
Reviews

Language Learning Tasks : Lancaster Practical Papers in English Language Education Volume 7

Christopher N. Candlin and Dermot Murphy (Eds.) Cambridge : The University Press, 1987. pp. 165

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This 165-page collection of articles is the first of its kind to provide perspectives on language learning tasks and their role in a language learning curriculum. The collection comprises an introduction by the two editors, followed by several articles by English language educators all of whom have researched and experimented with language learning tasks.

The articles follow a steady progression from a description of the background and general principles towards the practical aspects involved in designing, managing and evaluating tasks.

In the first article, "Towards Task-based Language Learning", Candlin describes the background to task design and use with the principles and considerations underlying the approach and how they are translated into classroom practice. This is also mentioned by Breen who, in his "Learner Contributions to Task Design", examines the role of learners and their contribution to tasks. Progressing from this basic notion, he then develops guidelines for task design.

In "Instructional Task and Discoursal Outcome" in L2 Classroom", Wright reports upon the behaviour and performance of learners as they tackle various tasks and explains how teachers can study the process in order to examine the teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Littlejohn and Hicks, in "Task-centered Writing Activities", describe a new type of task, a business-writing simulation for Business-English students. The rationale for this approach and some suggestions on how to use it are given along with samples of the materials and students' written work.

Somerville Ryan seems to attack the unstructured approach to using tasks with little intervention on the part of the teacher. In his article, "Taking Slow Learners to Tasks", he emphasizes learners' differences and presents a set of materials from the project he conducted while at the Curriculum Development Institution of Singapore in 1984. The materials in form of cards intended to promote students' use of language both orally and in writing are exemplified with recommendations on how to exploit them in order to meet specific educational goals and the needs of the students.

Coleman also tackles one problem commonly faced by many teachers: large classes. In "Language Learning in Large Crowds", he explains how a task-based approach can be exploited in any class where there are problems and describes the various types of tasks that can be generated by varying the input data and classroom-management procedures.

The collection ends with one of the most controversial issues--how to evaluate task-based approach. In "Communicative Curriculum Validation: A Task-based Approach", R.M. Rea explains how integral a part this process plays in a task-based approach. She describes the key issues and problems involved in evaluation before showing the results of the long-term use of evaluation procedures on a regular basis.