# Syllabus design

In the last twenty years or so a range of alternative syllabus models have been proposed, including a task-based approach. In this piece I want to look at some of the elements that a syllabus designer needs to take into consideration when he or she embraces a task-based approach to creating syllabuses and pedagogical materials. Questions that want to explore Include: What are tasks? What Is the role of a focus on form In language learning tasks? Where do tasks come from? What Is the relationship between communicative tasks In the world outside the classroom and pedagogical tasks?

What Is the relationship between tasks and language focused exercises? Task-based syllabuses represent a particular realization of communicative language teaching. Instead of beginning the design process with lists of grammatical, functional-notional, and other items, the designer conducts a needs analysis which yields a list of the target tasks that the targeted learners will need to carry out in the 'real-world' outside the classroom. Examples of target tasks include: Taking part in a Job interview. Completing a credit card application. Finding one's way from a hotel to a subway station. Checking Into an hotel.

Any approach to language pedagogy will need to once Itself with three essential elements: language data, Information, and opportunities for practice; Language Data By language data, I mean samples of spoken and written language. I take it as axiomatic that, without access to data, it is impossible to learn a language. Minimally, all that is needed to acquire a language is access to appropriate samples of aural language in contexts that make transparent the relationship between form, function and use. In

language teaching, a contrast is drawn between authentic" and " non-authentic" data.

Authentic data are samples of spoken or written language that have to been specifically written for the purposes of language teaching. " Non-authentic" data are dialogues and reading passages that HAVE been specially written. Here are two conversations that Illustrate the saltcellars and differences between authentic and non-authentic data. Both are concerned with the functions of asking for and giving directions. I needn't spell out which is which, because it is obvious. A: Excuse me please. Do you know where the nearest bank is? B: Well, the city bank isn't far from here. Do you know where the main post office is? A: No, not really.

I'm Just passing through. B: Well, first go down this street to the traffic light. A: K B: Then turn left and go west on Sunset Boulevard for about two blocks. The bank is on your right, Just past the post office. A: All right. Thank you. B: You're welcome. Conversation 2 A: How do I get to Kensington Road? B: Well, you go down Fullerton Road . A: what, down Old Blair Road and around ...? B: Yeah. And then you go straight A: past the hospital? B: Yeah, keep going straight, past the racecourse to the roundabout. You know the big roundabout? A: Yeah. B: And Kensington Road's off to the right. A: What, off the roundabout? B: Yeah.

A: Right. Proponents of task-based language teaching have argued for the importance of incorporating authentic data into the classroom, although much has been made of the fact that authenticity is a relative matter, and that as soon as one extracts a piece of language from the communicative

context in which it occurred and takes it into the classroom, one is " De-authenticating" it to a degree. However, if learners only ever encounter contrived dialogues and listening texts, the task of learning the language will be made more difficult. (Nana, 1999). The reality is, that in FEEL contexts, learners deed both authentic AND non-authentic data.

Both provide learners with different aspects of the language. Information In addition to data, learners need information. They need experiential information about the target culture, they need linguistic information about target language systems, and they need process information about how to go about learning the language. They can get this information either deductively, when someone (usually a teacher) or a textbook provides an explicit explanation, or they can get it inductively. In an inductive approach, learners study examples of language and then formulate the rule.

Here is an example of an inductive exercise I use to review contrasting points of grammar. It is followed by the inductive reasoning of five of my students who carried out the tasks. Person A says and what Person B says? When doll lee use one form and when do we use the other? A: Eve seen Romeo and Juliet twice. B: Me too. I saw it last Tuesday and I lagan on the weekend. A: Want to go to the movies? B: No, I'm going to study tonight. We have an exam tomorrow, you know. I IA: Oh, in that case, I'll study as well. Student A: " A use present perfect because something happened in the past, but affecting things happening now.

Student B: " Present perfect tense is used only to describe a certain incidence in the past without describing the exact time of happening.

However, it is necessary to describe the time of happening when using the simple past tense. " Student C: " Simple past is more past than have seen. " Student D: " We use present perfect tense when the action happen many times. B. Focus on actual date and use past. " Student E: " A use present perfect to show how many times A have seen the film. B use simple past to show how much he love the film. " Student A: " A is talking about a future action which has no planning. For B, the action has already planned.

Student B: A is expressing something he wants to do immediately. B is expressing something he wants to do in the future. " Student C: " For A, the action will do in a longer future. For B, the action should be done within a short time. " Student D: " A doesn't tell the exact time. B confirms the studying time will be tonight. We use the verb to be plus going means must do something. Student E: " A is more sure to study than B tonight. " From these comments, you can see that learners, even those at roughly the same proficiency level, will be at very different stages in their understanding of grammatical principles and rules.

Some proponents of task-based pedagogy argue that an explicit, deductive approach is unnecessary, that it does not work, and that all . Although I am biased in favor of an inductive approach Practice The third and final essential element is practice. Unless you are extraordinarily gifted as a language learner, it is highly unlikely that you will get very far without extensive practice. In designing practice opportunities for my learners, I distinguish between tasks, exercises and activities; A task is a communicative act that does not usually have a restrictive focus on a single grammatical structure.

It also had a non-linguistic outcome. An exercise usually has a restrictive focus on a single language element, and has a linguistic outcome. An activity also has a restrictive focus on one or two language items, but also has a communicative outcome. In that sense, activities have something in common with tasks and something in common with exercises. I distinguish between real-world or target tasks, which are communicative acts that we achieve through language in the world outside the classroom, and pedagogical tasks, which are carried out in the classroom.

I subdivide pedagogical tasks into those with a rehearsal rationale and those with a pedagogical rationale. These different Real-world or target task: A communicative act we achieve through language in the world outside the classroom. Pedagogical tasks: A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than forms. They have a non-linguistic outcome, and can be divided into rehearsal tasks or activation tasks.

Rehearsal task: A piece of classroom work in which learners rehearse, in class, a communicative act they will carry out outside of the class. Activation task: A piece of classroom work involving communicative interaction, but NOT one in which learners will be rehearsing for some out-of-class communication. Rather they are designed to activate the acquisition process. Enabling skills: Mastery of language systems grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary etc. Which ENABLE learners to take part in communicative tasks.

Language exercise: A piece of classroom work focusing learners on, and involving learners in manipulating some aspect of the linguistic system Communication activity: A piece of classroom work involving a focus on a particular linguistic feature but ALSO involving the genuine exchange of meaning. Examples of pedagogical tasks, communicative activities and language exercises from " Expressions" Language exercise Write the past tense form of these verbs: go, is, are, do, have, work, study, buy, pick, make, put, read. Now think of four things you did yesterday. Write sentences in the blanks.

First I got up and Communicative activity Then, Next, Finally, Write three hobbies or activities you like / like doing. 2. 3. Ask each person in your group what they like / like doing. Decide on a suitable gift for each person. Pedagogical task rehearsal Write your resume. Now, imagine you're applying for one of these Jobs. Your partner is applying for the Compare your partner with other applications for the Job. Who is the best candidate? Pedagogical tasks activation List three things you're thinking about doing this week. I Activity I II. I Recommendation 1 13. 1 12. Group work.

Tell your partners what you're thinking about doing. For each activity, get a recommendation and a reason from three different people. Then write the best recommendations in the chart. The essential difference between a task and an exercise is that a task has a nonlinguistic outcome. Target or real-world tasks are the sorts of things that individuals typically do outside of the classroom. Pedagogical tasks, are designed to activate acquisition processes. TASK 1 : Find examples of these different tasks, activity and exercise types in a textbook you are currently using or one with which you are familiar with.

How can they be combined? Steps in designing a task-based program Having specified target and pedagogical tasks, the syllabus designer analyzes these in order to identify the knowledge and skills that the learner will need to have in order to carry out the tasks. The next step is to sequence and integrate the tasks with enabling exercises designed to develop the requisite knowledge and skills. As I have already indicated, one key distinction between an exercise and a task, is that exercises will have purely language related outcomes, while tasks will have non- language related outcomes, as well as language related ones.

These are the steps that I follow in designing language programs. 1 . Select and sequence real-world / target tasks 2. Create pedagogical tasks (rehearsal / activation) 3. Identify enabling skills: create communicative activities and language exercises 4. Sequence and integrate pedagogical tasks, communicative activities and language exercises Here is a diagrammatic representation of how I see these various elements fitting together. Seven principles for task-based language teaching The following picture shows the seven principles behind the instructional sequence presented above?

Read the final section of this chapter and take down notes on the most important ideas. [pick] 1 -Scaffolding : Lessons and materials should provide supporting frameworks within which the learning takes place. At the beginning of the learning process, learners should not be expected to produce language that has not been explicitly taught. -Task dependency : Within a lesson, one task should grow out of, and build upon the ones that have gone before. -Recycling : Recycling language maximizes opportunities

for learning and activates the " organic" 4-Active learning Learners learn best by actively using the language they are learning. 5-elongation Learners should be taught in ways that make clear the relationships between grammatical form, communicative function, and semantic meaning. 6-Reproduction to Recreation : In reproductive tasks, learners reproduce language models provided by the teacher, the textbook or the tape. These tasks are designed to give learners mastery of form, meaning and function, and provide a basis for creative tasks.