

Empirical learning of second language acquisition for teacher development: What will task-based language learning suggest to prospective teachers of English?

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1. Tasks and teacher development

Tasks are potential for changing the present English language teaching in Japan into one that will further foster students' second language learning. According to Ellis (2003), tasks promote the cognitive processes by which language acquisition or development takes place. These cognitive processes are systematically described in a model of second language acquisition explicated by Gass and Selinker (2008). The model explains that the cognitive processes involved in second language acquisition occur dynamically and interactively from input to output by way of noticing, comprehending, intake, and integrating. In the presentation, task-based communication is interpreted as a medium to induce the students' cognitive processes for second language acquisition. It is employed in the author's semester courses, mainly taken by prospective teachers of English, and used to investigate how those students reflect on their own language learning and communication during and after the courses, and compare them with their language learning before their participation in the courses.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background to support this presentation consists of community involvement learning, sociocultural theory, cerebration, and reflective writing. The first two are related to language teaching methodology while the other two are cognitive aspects of language learning and teacher development. One of the methodological principles of my course projects derives from community involvement learning, which is intended to get learners to use the target language in the real world through interaction with speakers of the language in the learners' own community or elsewhere in the world. The course projects were conducted in the form of weekly communication sessions with assistant language teachers (ALTs) in the local community. The other principle of sociocultural theory leads the students to learn language first with others and then individually. Cognitive processing after experiential learning is essential. Cerebration is the activity used in community involvement learning (Ingram, Kono, O'Neill, & Sasaki, 2008), by which language learners reflect on their use of

language and their cross-cultural attitudes with the support of their teachers. Reflective writing is a cognitive method that is frequently and widely used for teacher education (Borg, 2006). Since it is also employed as a research tool for studying language teacher cognition, it will reveal how the project influences the students' beliefs about language learning and teaching.

3. Projects for prospective teachers

In this presentation, the 2007, 2008, 2009 course projects are introduced. Twelve to twenty students participated in a semester task-based communication project entitled "Intercultural Oral Communication Project (IOCP)" organised by the present author. They were mainly 2nd-year students who would like to become teachers of English after graduation. They were expected to consider language learning and teaching methods for their future teaching career through the IOCP.

4. IOCP task's potentials

Their reflective writing about language learning and communication in a target language revealed that the IOCP was taken as a good opportunity to think about second language acquisition. For those students who knew English grammar but could not use it well for actual communication, the impact of "using" English with native speakers of English to complete the project tasks seemed to be high. One student stated after the 7th of 8 IOCP sessions in the 2009 Semester 1, "Maybe there are some problems in the teaching of English. For example, I didn't practice speaking English with real English speakers. Through the IOCP, I strongly feel that language learners need to interact with real speakers."

Tasks are potential, at least to the present author, because they create social interaction, negotiation of meaning, authentic context, meaning focus, information gap, purposeful communication, connected spoken discourse, and cultural understanding by "using language."

References

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