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Understanding by Design: EFL Teachers' Perceptions

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Bio Data

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Abstract

This paper reports on three professional development workshops conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshops were intended for teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The primary aims of the workshops were (1) to familiarize the participants with Understanding by Design (UbD) asa curriculum development framework, (2) to analyze their perceptions of UbD, and (3) to understand whether UbD could be used to develop effective EFL curricula in Bangladesh. Additional data were collected from a teacher who, after attending the workshops,used UbD to teach an instructional unit on multi-paragraph essay writing. Three primary methods of data collection were naturalistic observation, open-ended questionnaires, and unstructured interviews. A qualitative analysis of the data indicated that the participating teachersexpressed positive perceptions of UbD and that UbDcould be utilized to design effective EFL curriculato bring about expected EFL outcomes in Bangladesh.

Key words: teacher education, understanding by design, EFL, curriculum development, Bangladesh

Introduction

Sociocultural theorists believe that learning occurs through participation in social activities (see, for example, Cole, 1996; Saxe, 1999). Theorists in this tradition draw heavily on the work of Lev Vygotsky, who believes that individuals learn by *internalizing* various cultural aspects such as language, physical tools, and symbols. They also transform their

practices by negotiating meaning with others and situating their individual action within collective activity (Knapp, 2008). This sociocultural perspective views learning as embedded within social events in which individuals interact with other individuals, objects, and events. Therefore, "understanding learning requires a focus on how individuals participate in particular activities, and how they draw on artifacts, tools, and social others to solve local problems" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 450). Recent developments of sociocultural theories in second language acquisition (SLA) research have challenged our understanding of the traditional cognitive and behaviorist approaches to teaching and learning (Cross, 2010). An emphasis on this approach focuses our attention on the situated nature of language learning and the context in which it takes place. It also calls for increased awareness of how teachers identify themselves, understand their professional roles, and develop relationships with students, texts, and contexts in order to better facilitate the learning processes. Therefore, the sociocultural approach might offer valuable insights into our understanding of EFL teacher education.

In Bangladesh, EFL is taught as a core subject in Grades 1 – 12. Although very few people speak English in their personal lives outside classrooms, the government focuses heavily on the English language for international business, increasing job opportunities for its citizens, and educational development. Realizing the importance of learning English, the government introduced a series of policy changes in 2000. In spite of the reform initiatives, the situation of English language teaching (ELT) has failed to show significant achievements (Chowdhury& Le Ha, 2008; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). What are the factors affecting the ELT situation in Bangladesh? Why and how do teachers adapt their curricular and pedagogic practices? Although most teachers depend heavily on English language teaching methods for their pedagogic practices, there are claims that the ELT methods, originated mostly in the USA and the UK, often undermine the local knowledge and cultural values about teaching and learning (see, for example, Akbari, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Pennycook, 1989; Wedell, 2009). The intermittent consideration of sociocultural settings in the Western ELT methods calls for a locally-situated pedagogy for foreign language acquisition (Anwaruddin, 2011). Therefore, it will be fallacious to recommend any method of instruction or curriculum design before considering the actual contexts of teaching and learning. Keeping this sociocultural perspective in mind, I present an analysis of EFL teachers' perceptions of Understanding by Design (UbD) as a curriculum design framework. In this analysis, I use data drawn primarily from three professional development workshops that I conducted and my classroom observations of and interviews with an EFL teacher who participated in these

workshops.

What is UbD?

UbDis a three-step curriculum development framework that takes a *means-ends* approach to designing and implementing a curriculum. This framework gathers learning outcomes and assessment evidences before specifying instructional procedures. Using the theory of Backward Design, Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins designed and popularized UbDas a curriculum framework. McTighe and Wiggins (2004) define Backward Designas:

> A process to designing curriculum by beginning with the end in mind and designing toward that end. In backward design, one starts with the end—the desired results (goals or standards)—and identifies the evidence necessary to determine that the results have been achieved, that is, the assessments. With the results and assessments clearly specified, one can determine the necessary (enabling) knowledge and skill, and the teaching needed to equip students to perform. (p. 290)

As a framework, UbD helps teachers identify the big ideas of a unit and the essential questions which guide both the teacher and students through the learning processes. For a standards-based education system, the UbD can be very helpful because it gives teachers an opportunity to unpack the standards and identify the big ideas, essential questions, knowledge, and skills that students need to learn. Another distinct feature of the UbD is that it capitalizes on performance task as the culminating assessment of a unit. Research suggests that students' interest and motivation level increases when they are involved in performance tasks (Khattri, Reeve, & Kane, 1998). Their understanding deepens when they engage in a complex investigation, often containing several layers of explanation, of a subject matter. Since a performance task requires students to practically apply their knowledge and skills, it helps them engage in an active learning. In UbD, performance tasks are presented to students as a part of the regular instruction, and they have to be meaningful to both teachers and students. Two basic characteristics of these tasks are: (1) they "require an extended period of time to complete," and (2) by performing these tasks, students "construct new knowledge" (Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993, p. 26).

UbD has three stages for a curriculum unit: desired results, assessment evidence, and learning plan (McTighe & Wiggins, 2004). In Stage 1, curricular goals are established. Based on these goals, the curriculum designer identifies the big ideas students should understand, and the essential questions they should ask in order to foster an understanding and a transfer of their learning. Then, the designer specifies the knowledge and skills students will learn by

the end of the unit. In other words, the knowledge and skills indicate what the students will know and be able to do. Stage 2 describes assessment evidences which determine whether or not the students have achieved the desired results. Evidences of learning and understanding are assessed by a performance task as the culminating assessment of the unit. In this assessment, students carry out an authentic task to demonstrate their understandings. The description of this performance task also lists the key criteria for assessment. Moreover, Stage 2 includes other relevant assessment tools such as observation, quizzes, tests, homework, and the like. These reflect students' understanding of the big ideas which are also assessed in the performance task. Finally, Stage 3 describes a detailed learning plan. Specific learning experiences and instructions that enable students to achieve the desired results are precisely mentioned in this stage. A UbD unit plan has a distinct structural look with three stages that specifically describe the components of each stage. Based on the standards/goals, Stage 1 describes the desired results of student learning. Stage 2 explains the assessment evidences that indicate whether or not the desired results are achieved. Finally, Stage 3 describes all learning experiences and instructional procedures that enable students to achieve the curricular goals (see Appendix A for a UbD template, and McTighe & Wiggins, 2004 for details of the design).

UbD in Bangladesh through the Lens of Sociocultural Theory

Bangladesh, like any other countries where English is used as a major foreign language, is under pressure to produce competent users of the English language. Although English has been in school curriculum since the colonial period, most people in Bangladesh lack communicative competence in English. Grammar-translation has been the dominant method of instruction which has resulted in more competence in reading and writing than in speaking and listening (Hasan, 2004). To tackle this situation, the government collaborated with various overseas organizations such as the British Council and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). In collaboration with them, Bangladesh made a comprehensive plan called English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP). In 2000, the government introduced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to teaching English in grades 1 − 12. Other initiatives of the ELTIP included hiring foreign experts, mainly from the UK, to train and supervise English language teachers and to advise curricular reforms. Since then, many pre-service and in-service teachers have gone to the English-speaking West to pursue higher education in ELT. Many universities in Bangladesh have also introduced graduate programs in ELT and TESOL. However, after one decade of

investing various types of resource, the goals of ELTIP have remained unattained (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Additionally, CLT and other Western language teaching methods have been criticized for cultural incompatibility and conflict of values (Akbari, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Considering these and other factors in English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh, Chowdhury and Le Ha (2008) recommend that professional development courses be conducted for Bangladeshi EFL teachers on a regular basis. They also emphasize the need to involve local trainers who are knowledgeable about the sociocultural context. Therefore, as a Bangladeshi teacher educator, I hope to bring about ideas and information that might shed light on our understanding of ELT curriculum and pedagogy in Bangladesh.

Since education is fundamentally a social process, many educationists recommend that pedagogical practices be based on cultural patterns of a society. They call for a *culturally relevant pedagogy* which "builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and teachers can enhance students' success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice" (Irvine, 2010, p. 58). Theories of social constructivism hold that "social interaction, cultural tools, and activity shape individual development and learning" (Woolfolk, 2001, p. 330). In this way, education becomes meaningful and individuals reach their full potential when they participate in their own culture. It is, therefore, imperative to analyze a society's views on learning and teaching. For instance, discovery learning, which is highly regarded in most Western societies, may not be appropriate in a society which looks at learning as a process of acquiring knowledge from an "all-knowing" teacher. Hence, society's views and ideologies need to be reflected in instructional practices. In addition, the meaningfulness of education depends to a large extent on how individuals in a particular community interpret the meaning of certain things and create reality (Bruner, 1996). Thus, as Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot (2009) recommend, non-Western cultures should re-evaluate and reconstruct pedagogic practices imported from the West according to the norms and values of their own cultures.

Grounded in this sociocultural view of teaching and learning, the present study involved three professional development workshops for English language teachers and observation of a series of EFL classes in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The professional development workshops were important for the participants because they had never used the UbD as a curriculum development framework. As research shows (Brown, 2004; Childre, Sands & Pope, 2009), UbD helps educators not only to bring about expected learning outcomes but also to increase students' motivation to learn. This, however, leads us to an analysis of the study-context which is important because, as discussed above, society and culture are two

important sources of instructional practices and learning activities. In terms of cultural/regional context, UbD has been successfully used in many schools across the United States and Canada (Brown, 2004). Is it then logical to assume that it will be equally effective in Bangladesh, which is socio-culturally different from North America? An answer to this question requires scrutiny, inspiring me to investigate whether the teachers of English in Bangladesh would be interested in using the UbD framework. Thus, I hope that the findings of my study will add new insights to our understanding of the pedagogical effectiveness of UbD when used in an alternative sociocultural setting.

Methodology

Research Context

University College[1] where the professional development workshops were conducted is a private urban university located in the city of Dhaka. Students come to University College (UC) from both urban and rural areas. A diversity of socio-economic status is generally observed in every class of students. All students speak Bengali as their mother tongue, and their proficiency in English varies to considerable degrees. The majority of the student population comes from schools where the medium of instruction is Bengali. In those schools, students are required to take EFL courses from grade 1 through 12. On the other hand, there are schools where the medium of instruction is English. Most of the students who graduate from these schools are generally proficient users of English. Many of these graduates come to UC for higher education. As a result, each class at UC comprises students with varying levels of competence in English. Because of mixed-ability students, every EFL class has several sections corresponding to different proficiency levels. According to students' scores in English in their Admission Test, they are advised to take specific sections of an EFL course. At UC, all undergraduate students are required to complete at least two EFL courses (6 credits) regardless of their major areas of study and proficiency levels in English.

The UbD Workshops

To meet the objectives of this study, I facilitated three professional development workshops for in-service EFL teachers. Each workshop focused on each of the three sections of the UbD template, namely, Desired Results, Assessment Evidence, and Learning Plan (see

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[1] Pseudonym is used to maintain the anonymity of the institution.

Appendix A). Each workshop was held for 2 hours. During the workshops, I used both lectures and group-activities to facilitate the learning and understanding of the participants. Additionally, I used PowerPoint presentations to visually communicate the ideas and contents of the workshops. I also prepared handouts with important information and worksheets for individual and group activities. During the workshops, the participants were given opportunities to share their ideas and to demonstrate teaching practices and sample UbD unit plans that they created. Three workshops were conducted in three consecutive weeks. The one-week intervals between the workshops were purposely planned to give the participants enough time to think about and reflect on the previous workshop. Moreover, the workshops were conducted while the classes were in session and the participating teachers were very busy teaching their classes; therefore, the intervals were helpful for them.

Participants

Twenty one EFL teachers participated in the professional development workshops. All of them teach English to undergraduate students at UC. Some of the participants teach English to development professionals of various organizations and to adult learners of English who are not university students. A number of participants are also involved in teacher training programs designed for elementary and junior high school teachers across the country. All of the participants are Bangladeshi nationals who speak Bengali as their mother tongue and English as a foreign language. All of them have one or two master degree(s) in English or TESOL or in a related field, but none holds a PhD degree. The participants are very passionate about teaching English and seem to be motivated to learn new knowledge and strategies for their professional development.

Pre-Assessment

From a pre-workshop assessment, it has been observed that the participants' professional experience ranges from 1 to 13 years. They are generally skilled at designing goal-oriented lesson plans and instructional materials. At UC, they are required to make lesson plans using a specific format prior to teaching each class session. They also share their lesson plans with peers in weekly reflection meetings. Moreover, they keep a folder to preserve their lesson plans for future reference and sharing with colleagues. To design each lesson, all teachers are required to follow a Course Delivery Plan which specifies topics to be taught in each class session.

The participants seem to be motivated to learn from each other and to strive for

professional excellence. In each term, they observe at least two class sessions taught by their peers. New teachers are advised to observe as many classes as they can. Teachers also share their teaching experiences with peers in weekly reflection meetings. They often adjust their teaching practices based on feedback received from peers and students. Most of them are aware of the *best practices* in their area. Some of them, however, find it difficult to go beyond their own area and understand what constitutes *best practices* in education in general. One of the reasons for this, according to them, is a gap between content-based and skill-based education. They believe that they cannot always follow the best practices in education because they teach skills of the English language. In short, the participants are aware of the importance of instructional design. Although they generally use one type of design template for planning lessons, they are interested in learning new design methods for their professional development.

Data Sources& Collection Methods

In this study, I took a qualitative approach to data collection. My goal was to explore the underlying thoughts and beliefs of the participants. With this end in mind, I have chosen my research goal which relies less on quantitatively measurable activities, and more on the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and sociocultural factors operative at individual level. For this nature of the investigation, I selected a qualitative approach that appeared to be appropriate because the study was concerned with exploration and discovery. To guide my inquiry, I collected data in two phases: during and after the workshops.

During the workshops, I used naturalistic observation and open-ended questionnaires to collect data. Observation as a method provided me with an opportunity to watch the behavioral patterns of the participants. The observations were naturalistic because I carried them out in a setting where the observable behaviors naturally occurred. In addition to observations, I used questionnaires as a data-collection technique. My main aim was to understand the participants' feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of the study topic, that is, UbD as a curriculum development framework. The questionnaire that I used was qualitative in nature and contained open-ended items. This type of questionnaire is frequently "used for exploratory research, such as when the researcher wants to know how participants think or feel or experience a phenomenon or when the researcher wants to know why participants believe something happens" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 177). The questionnaires, completed by the participants at the end of each workshop, helped me identify their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the UbD as a curriculum development framework.

After conducting all three workshops, I gathered data from a teacher who participated in the workshops. In this phase, I used two techniques: classroom observation and interview.I observed classroom activities during a unit when the participant used the UbD framework. My main aim was to observe the participant's professional action as it originally took place in a classroom setting. In second/foreign language teacher education, classroom observation has long been used as an effective tool for professional development (Wallace, 1991). Hence, I used this opportunity to tap into the participant's experience of the action and beliefs about using UbD. My role during the observations was that of a complete observer from outside. Instead of participating in any classroom activities, I observed whatever happened in the classroom and took extensive field-notes. I took an unstructured approach to observation because I wanted to gather data in a natural and open-ended way. I did not pre-determine and specify the types of data to be gathered. Thus, I observed the participant behaviors "as the stream of actions and events as they naturally unfold[ed]" (Punch, 1998, p. 185).

Additionally, I used qualitative interviewing to obtain information about the participant's thoughts and beliefs about using UbD. Interviewing as a research method is very important when a researcher is interested in the lived experience of other individuals and how they make meaning of their experience. Through understanding this experience, the researcher gains insights into crucial issues as reflected in the lives of those individuals. When the interviewees tell their stories, they provide the interviewer with access to their inner world, and thus a way of understanding their action. Therefore, interviewing can be a powerful method of inquiry when the researcher is concerned with making meaning through language (Seidman, 2006). In my study, interviewing allowed me, in Patton's (1987) words, "to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person's perspective" (cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 207). Without any protocol, I followed an informal conversational style which helped me understand the participant's behaviors and perceptions because the interviews did not impose "any *a priori* categorization which might limit the field of inquiry" (Punch, 1998, p. 178). I took field-notes during and immediately after the interviews and used these notes as an important data source.

I collected the data by using three different techniques—observation, questionnaire, and interview—so that I could triangulate them. Triangulation "is a process in which the data are looked at from a range of perspectives – usually at least three, if not more" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 179). Researchers have different ideas about triangulation. Some believe that data should be gathered from three different sets of people. Others believe that data should be collected using at least three different techniques. Agreeing with the latter group, I

utilized the triangulation process in my study as a means of achieving greater validity of the research data. The open-ended questionnaires provided me with information about the participants' attitudes and perceptions of UbD. Unstructured interviews were helpful for entering into the inner world of the participant who implemented UbD in one of her instructional units. Finally, naturalistic observations helped me see the participants' behaviors in a natural setting and understand how one participant transferred her theoretical understanding into actual classroom practices.

Data Analysis

I gathered a wide range of qualitative data using three different methods: observation, questionnaire, and interview. As Gibbs (2011) describes, qualitative data sets tend to be large, complex, and detailed. I used the Miles and Huberman framework to analyze this voluminous data set. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose this framework comprising three main components: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction happens in several stages. First, the researcher edits, segments, and summarizes the data. Second, she/he uses coding and memoing to find out themes and patters in ideas. In the final stages of data reduction, the researcher tries to develop understandings through conceptualizing and explaining. Data display, the second component of the Miles and Huberman framework, is very important because qualitative data are usually voluminous and bulky, and various display techniques such as charts, diagrams, concept-maps etc. can be very helpful in organizing, compressing, and assembling the gathered information. These two components of the framework happen concurrently and assist the researcher in drawing conclusions, that is, the third and final component of the framework. I found this Miles and Huberman framework very helpful in analyzing the qualitative data in my research.

To promote theoretical validity, I used extended fieldwork as a strategy. Extended fieldwork implies that "for both discovery and validation researchers should collect data in the field over an extended time period" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 276). However, researcher bias was a potential threat to the validity of this study. Generally, researcher bias refers to finding information and results which support the researcher's proposition or hypothesis. Since I designed my study as an exploratory and less-structured qualitative inquiry, I was not completely immune to researcher bias. However, I tried to overcome this threat of researcher bias by paying equal attention to all findings and data. In addition, I took measures to maximize descriptive and interpretive validity and to accurately interpret, describe, and peer-review all findings. Because the participants and I, as the researcher, are

from the same sociocultural background, it was easier for me to interpret the participants' behaviors. For internal validity, two conceptual frameworks were used: *researcher-as-detective* and *rule out alternative explanations*. Like a detective, I thoroughly analyzed the evidences and any cause-and-effect relationships. The competing explanations and evidences were also carefully examined and peer-reviewed before agreeing on the best explanation. Additionally, I used naturalistic generalization to ensure external validity of the findings.

Findings

While conducting the workshops, I observed the participants' behaviors at all times. They paid close attention to the workshops and activities and my lectures. It was fascinating to observe how they tried to understand UbD as a curriculum development framework. Moreover, to deepen their understanding, they never hesitated to challenge me by asking conceptual and theoretical questions. Many of the participants went even further and volunteered to share their teaching experiences with the whole-group. Additionally, they took extensive notes during the workshops and preserved all handouts I provided them with. One may argue that this kind of behavior and positive attitude during professional development workshops are naturally expected from in-service teachers. Keeping this in mind, I had the participants respond to an open-ended questionnaire at the end of each workshop. These anonymously responded questionnaires served as a valuable data source and informed my understanding of the participants' perceptions of the UbD framework.

An important finding of the professional development workshops is the participants' belief that they can benefit from using UbD in their teaching context.(It should be noted that the teachers voluntarily participated in the workshops for their professional development.) After attending the workshops, none of them expressed any doubt about UbD's effectiveness in outcomes-based education. An analysis of participants' responses and feedback sought at the end of the workshops indicates that they are convinced by the design and underlying principles of UbD. They are now confident that they can implement Understanding by Design in their classrooms. One of the participants thinks that "adopting UbD will greatly help the students to learn easily." This response is important because here the participant is concerned more with student learning than with her/his teaching. This indicates that she/he has learned to focus on how students learn (learner-centered approach), instead of how she/he teaches them (teacher-centered approach). Another participant finds the UbD "scientific and worth following." By the word "scientific" the participant probably implies the structural patterns of the stages in a UbD unit plan. It is also possible that the clearly defined goals, learning

outcomes, and the assessments give the unit plan a scientific attribute. Another participant writes: "I can use UbD because it will help me guide my students in terms of their learning goals. They can be sure in the beginning of each unit about what they are expected to learn and know, and how they will be assessed." In short, most of the participants express optimism that they can use the UbD in their teaching context which will help their students to learn the required knowledge and skills.

Another finding of the study is a little bit of skepticism in terms of time management. Some participants are afraid that making UbD unit plans will take a lot of their time. They perhaps think in this way because they are required to make detailed lesson plans for each class session. Making unit plans, in addition to lesson plans, seems to be time-consuming for them. The third important finding is some participants' belief that implementing the idea of 'overarching understanding' can be difficult in their skill-based education program. They argue that it is not always possible to find understandings for interdisciplinary connections, especially when they deal with skills of a foreign language. They believe that it is easier to find overarching understandings while dealing with content-based instruction such as geography, chemistry, or sociology. Although a few of the participants express skeptical attitudes toward the UbD, most of them strongly believe that UbD can be of great importance not only for their professional development but also for students' effective learning of EFL.

After conducting the workshops, I wanted to know how the participants (if any) applied their understanding of UbD to their actual classroom practices. One of the participants was willing to use the UbD framework in one of her instructional units and to let me observe her class-sessions. This participant named Maya[2] used UbD for the first time. In her second year of teaching, Maya was educated in Bangladesh and had an MA in English Language Teaching. In the unit that I observed, she taught multi-paragraph essay writing to first-year undergraduate students. The unit spanned over three weeks in which she taught six class-sessions. In all six sessions, the main goal of my observations was to understand how she played her roles as a designer and assessor of student learning. In the beginning of her unit, she clearly identified the learning objectives for her students. Then, she provided her students with a handout that clearly explained four important components of Stage One of the UbD curriculum: enduring understanding, essential questions, knowledge, and skills. I found these four components closely aligned with the identified learning objectives. The understandings, as they appeared in my field-notes, are as follows:

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[2] Pseudonym is used to maintain the participant's confidentiality.

To meet the objectives, students will need to understand:

- Writing involves more than simply writing down ideas, it requires making sense of them as well.
- Writing is a necessary skill for academic success in university.
- One can express her ideas and opinions in an organized manner by writing essays.
- Different types of essays can be drafted according to the needs and purposes of an author.
- In a multi-paragraph essay, an author can present, interpret, support, and conclude her ideas/arguments.
- Depending on the type of essay, one needs to choose an appropriate approach to organizing information.
- Collecting and interpreting relevant information is important in successful essay writing.

After laying out the concepts students must understand, Maya described the essential questions that would help the students understand the above-mentioned concepts. She specified the following questions that students must ask in order to deepen their understanding of the concepts taught in the unit.

To understand, students will need to consider such questions:

- What do good writers do?
- How is an essay different from a paragraph?
- Why is essay writing an important skill for academic success?
- How does one know which approach to organizing an essay is appropriate to one's purpose?
- What roles do transitional devices play in maintaining coherence in a multi-paragraph essay?
- How can one develop her skills in writing multi-paragraph essays?
- How can one gather and accurately interpret relevant information?

By finding answers to these questions, students were supposed to meet the learning objectives of the unit. I found that these questions were an effective tool to stimulate students' curiosity.

The next component of Stage One of the UbD unit is the knowledge students must gain in the unit. I observed that Maya clearly explained what she expected her students to know by the end of the instructional unit.

To understand, students will need to know:

- Differences between a paragraph and an essay

- The structure of a typical five-paragraph academic essay

- An appropriate use of hook/attention grabber and a thesis statement in the beginning of an essay

- Techniques of developing ideas with supporting details in the body of an essay

- Synthesizing main ideas and concluding an essay

- A basic outline of a comparison/contrast essay

- Methods of analyzing causes and effects of an event/issue

- Appropriate use of descriptive words and images, and importance of details in description and narration essays

- Methods of data collection and interpretation

According to the principles of UbD, only knowing is not enough for students; they must be able to demonstrate their knowledge by performing specific jobs. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that students are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the concepts taught in the unit. The participant-teacher specified the indicators to measure her students' ability.

To understand, students will need to be able to:

- Distinguish between a paragraph and an essay

- Identify and list important features of a multi-paragraph essay

- Locate hook, thesis statement, supporting details, and conclusion in a sample essay

- Place appropriate transitional words in a fill-in-the-blank exercise

- Make an outline of an essay based on the concepts learned through class discussion

- Find appropriate information from the internet, books, journals, and newspapers, and accurately interpret them

- Write a first draft of an essay, upon consultation with the instructor

- Write a final draft of the essay by incorporating the teacher's feedback

- Evaluate a *writing situation* and appropriately choose an approach to organizing ideas in an essay

- Apply the knowledge and skills learned in this unit to new situations and diverse contexts of writing

These activities were designed for students to demonstrate their understandings and thus achieve the objectives of the unit. I observed that all learning experiences during individual lessons were aligned with these activities.

In Stage Two of the UbD unit, the instructor is supposed to design assessment evidences. The main component of the assessment evidence is a performance task, which is effective for keeping students on-task, increase their motivation, and help them achieve the learning objectives (Bednarski, 2003; Chun, 2010). Following the UbD principles, Maya designed a performance task to assess her students' learning. What follows is a description of the task:

> Imagine that you are a researcher. You have been asked to analyze the possible causes and effects of students dropping out of high school in Mirpur area in the city of Dhaka. Your task is to write a report for the Dhaka Board of Education. Your work should exhibit such skills as finding relevant and reliable information, an accurate interpretation of data, and a logical organization of ideas.

I found this task very much meaningful to the students. Being familiar with the problem identified in the task, they seemed to be motivated to complete the assignment. I also observed that the teacher provided the students with an analytical rubric that would be used to assess their work. In addition to the performance task, the teacher specified other assessment tasks such as:

- Informal observation of class discussion and other activities
- Quizzes: Quiz I is on writing a clear thesis statement; Quiz II is on making an outline of an essay
- Skill Check (in-class): identifying attention-grabber, thesis statement, supporting details, and conclusion in a sample essay
- Journals (for students' self-assessment and reflection)**:** reflect on your learning of each stage in essay writing, data collection, documentation of sources, and accurate interpretation without author's bias
- Peer-review: students peer-review each other's work and provide constructive feedback

The teacher was very careful of implementing all these assessment tools to make sure that her students meet the learning objectives. She was successful in carrying out the third stage of the UbD unit, i.e., the learning plan. Both Maya and her students followed the learning plan which specified learning topics, classroom activities, assignments that were due, and

assessment activities. I noticed that because of this detailed and specific learning plan, there was no observable confusion during the classroom activities. Students were generally on-task and the teacher did not have any noticeable difficulty in managing the class. After observing all six class-sessions, I concluded that the teacher successfully played her roles as a designer and assessor of student learning.

After the teacher had finished her unit, I interviewed her in order to elicit more information about the studying phenomenon. In this informal conversation-style interview, my main goal was to understand her experience and perceptions of using UbD as a curriculum framework. What follows is an excerpt from our conversation:

Researcher (R): How was UbD different from other curricular methods you used before?

Maya (M): Well, it was different in many ways. But, I think the most important difference is that I was very sure about my destination. I knew where I was going.

R: What do you mean? Can you clarify that a bit further?

M: You know, in the UbD unit, I started with my end. Once I fixed my destination, everything else became clearer. All my instructional activities were targeted to that end. I think my students also found it helpful.

R: Why do you think so?

M: Because, you know, they typically come to me at the end of classes and ask me several questions about the tasks and assignments. In the UbD unit, fewer students came to me for further discussion and clarification.

R: Does that sufficiently justify your claim? They may have other reasons for not coming to you after the classes.

M: Um…well, it may be possible, but I thought they understood their assignments better, and that's why they did not come to me as often as they would usually.

R: So, are you gonna use UbD in the future?

M: I think I will.

R: Why?

M: Because I think I will be able to make a connection between students' learning objectives, my teaching activities, and assessment tools that I use. often feel a disconnect between these things. Lot of times, students are not tested on the concepts they actually learn in the classroom. Also, if I want to follow the learning objectives specified by the university [where Maya works]

for each module of the EFL program, you know, for each unit, I can choose um…the appropriate objectives and thus I think I can cover all objectives throughout a semester.

R: Would you recommend the UbD for other EFL teachers who work here or at other institutions across the country?

M: Yes, I would. I think all English teachers can use it and benefit from it. It will be helpful for the students as well. Reflecting on my experiences as a student, I can tell you I was not sure about what I was learning and on what I would be tested in many of my courses in high school and university. I think if teachers use a framework like UbD, it will be very helpful for students because they can be sure about their goals and how they should perform their tasks.

R: What was challenging? Did you face any difficulty in implementing your UbD unit?

M: Um…the only difficulty, I guess, was that I had to spend lot of time thinking and planning my unit. I had to plan everything prior to starting the unit. I did not usually plan everything beforehand. I start a unit with some general ideas and then decide my end and how I should assess my students' learning. But, for the UbD unit, I had to do everything even before I started my unit. So, it was kind of difficult.

R: Do you think it's worth it?

M: Yes, I do. I think it took me a while because I did it for the first time. But, once I get used to it, it will take me less time.

This conversation with Maya shows that she had a very positive attitude toward UbD. It also indicates how she was able to create and implement a cohesive and coherent curricular unit by specifying her goals, student learning objectives, and assessment activities. In this conversation, she also hints at classroom management which she found easier because her students knew what they were expected of. Thus, her experience and perceptions can be beneficial for other EFL teachers who work at different institutions across the country.

Discussion

A sociocultural approach to teacher education is necessary because teachers' background determines how they learn knowledge and create reality by interpreting meanings of various phenomena. For this reason, it is not appropriate to claim that a particular type of curriculum will be effective across nations because it has been effective in one country or region. Therefore, the teacher development workshops conducted at UC were very significant as they aimed to investigate how Bangladeshi EFL teachers would appreciate UbD as a

curriculum framework. According to Brown (2004), UbD has been widely and successfully used in many schools in North America. It has provided educators with an opportunity to bring about expected learning outcomes. The principles of UbD suggest that teachers focus on students' learning outcomes and accordingly design the instructional procedures. In other words, this framework advocates a truly learner-centered approach to curriculum development. Before starting a new unit, students are provided with the essential questions, enduring understanding, knowledge, and skills they need to learn in order to successfully complete the unit. Moreover, UbD uses a performance task as the culminating assessment of each unit. Because the performance tasks are authentic, meaningful, and engaging, they increase learner motivation, which is closely related to successful acquisition of any foreign language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Therefore, it seems that the UbD can be used in foreign language education to boost learner motivation, which has positive impact on teachers' professional development as well.

To my knowledge, UbD has not yet been utilized in the field of EFL, although other fields such as business studies and natural sciences have benefited from it. Roth, Anderson, and Mayes (2007) explain how they used UbD in science education. In their study, graduate students and in-service teachers effectively used UbD to achieve expected educational outcomes. Moreover, they were successful in creating science podcasts for students, and producing radio advertisements and articles. Daugherty (2006) describes how pharmaceutical educators might benefit from using UbD as a curriculum framework. In 2005, Kelting-Gibson conducted a study to compare backward design (foundation of UbD) to a traditional curriculum design method. The study found that the teachers who used the backward design outperformed those who used traditional curriculum methods. Kelting-Gibson (2005) reports that "when selecting instructional goals, backward design students [pre-service teachers] demonstrated ability to set more clear and suitable goals for students in the class" (p. 32). Thus, the available literature on UbD shows that it can be a valuable resource for teachers and curriculum practitioners for developing instructional plans that link learning activities and assessment procedures to the instructional goals. EFL teachers, like those in other fields, can also benefit by tapping into the UbD framework as a curricular resource.

My experiences gained from the teacher development workshops might add valuable insights to our understanding of the UbD. It seems that the UbD can be successfully used to maximize student learning in Bangladesh. Most of the teachers who participated in the workshops have agreed that their students may greatly benefit from it if they use this curriculum framework in their classrooms. The participants did not identify any sociocultural

barriers which may hinder the successful implementation of UbD in Bangladesh context. Only two concerns were raised by few of the participants: (1) implementing UbD may be time-consuming, and (2) finding interdisciplinary understandings can be difficult in EFL teaching because it deals with skills, not content. However, I argue that these two claims are weak and misleading for two main reasons. First, when teachers have a complete UbD unit plan, they do not have to spend a large amount of time on planning lessons. Lesson hints will be included in Stage 3 of the UbD unit. The teachers need to only take one lesson topic and instruction strategy from the unit plan and make a lesson plan for a class session. It is possible that sometimes teachers do not have to make an additional lesson plan on a piece of paper. If they follow a well-written unit plan, they can teach a lesson successfully only with a lesson-plan in their mind. Second, although skill-based teaching does not always focus on overarching understandings, inclusion of such understandings in each unit will help students know when and how to use their skills. They can better understand the transferability of their skills to unrehearsed situations. As Howard Gardner believes, an understanding is "the capacity to apply facts, concepts and skills in new situations in appropriate ways" (McTighe & Wiggins, 2004, p. 253). Therefore, it is an unwarranted claim that skill-based teaching should not include overarching understandings. Inclusion of such understandings will, in fact, help students become better user of the target skills.

In conclusion, it has been observed from my experiences of conducting three workshops that the UbD can be successfully used in Bangladesh and other similar contexts. Most of the participants are optimistic about its prospects in their teaching contexts. Their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn the UbD is an indicator of how they responded to it. Provided all these experiences and observations, I have come to believe that EFL teachers can greatly benefit from using UbD as a curriculum development framework. However, it should be noted that each teaching context is different from others. Learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and previous learning experiences constitute the unique character of a teaching-and-learning context. A central thesis in sociocultural theories of learning is that "all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 164). Therefore, a careful examination of learners and their social context is required before making any curricular decision or choosing instructional methods. For this logic, I studied the EFL teachers' perceptions during and after the UbD workshops. Although in the present study I have found that UbD as a curriculum development framework might be a valuable resource for Bangladeshi EFL teachers, I recommend replication of my study in other Asia-Pacific regions to understand UbD's applicability in specific contexts.

In this study, I used naturalistic generalization to overcome any potential limitation of generalizability and to ensure external validity of my findings. Naturalistic generalization refers to the notion that "the more similar the people and circumstances in a particular research study are to the ones that you want to generalize to, the more defensible your generalization will be and the more readily you should make such a generalization" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 281). Therefore, I hope that the findings will be useful for other EFL teachers in contexts similar to one in which this study was carried out. Rather than working as technicians to transmit chunks of pre-arranged knowledge, teachers can follow the UbD model and exercise their agency to design their own instructions (Walters & Newman, 2008). I also believe that UbD, if appropriately utilized, will bring about what Brown (2004) calls expected educational outcomes. In this way, UbD might assist Bangladeshi English language teachers in attaining the goals of ELTIP, which have thus far remained unfulfilled (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).

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Appendix A: Template for a UbD Unit Plan

Stage 1: Desired Results

Established Goals:

    1. ……………………………………………………………………………………….

    2. ………………………………………………………………………………………

Understandings:	Essential Questions:
Students will understand that…	1. …..
1. ………..	2. …….
2. ………………	3. ……..
Students will know…….	Students will be able to………

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task:	Other Evidence:
…………………………………………………… …. …………………………………………………… …	• ………………. • ………………. • ………………

Stage 3: Learning Plan

Learning Activities:

    • …………….

    • …………….

    • ……………

    • ……………

    • …………….

Aims and Outcomes: Teachers' Views of an Oral Interactive Task

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Abstract

This paper reports on teachers' views regarding an oral interactive task that was implemented into a newly designed intermediate-level curriculum at a university in Japan. Six EFL teachers who taught the course were interviewed after the first semester to determine whether the aims of the task, referred to as 'task-as-workplan' resulted in successful production of the intended L2 language, referred to as 'task-as-process'. There has been a significant amount of research on the use of oral tasks in Asian contexts (e.g., Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008; Robinson, 2001) however, the way in which teachers themselves view tasks has only rarely been taken into account (e.g., Jeon, 2006; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007) and there has sometimes been an assumption that all teachers will be in favor of using them. This article attempts to address this issue by reporting the views of teachers to determine whether they felt the chosen task could be used effectively within this context. The paper shows that despite certain problematic issues regarding task interaction, overall the task was seen as a useful pedagogic tool.

Keywords: task-as-workplan, task-as-process, spoken tasks, teachers, students, communication.

Introduction

There are many definitions of pedagogic tasks, however the one proposed by Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001) is generally familiar; 'a task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective' (p.11). Tasks provide learners with the opportunity to use English in order to achieve some sort of 'real-world' goal. Willis (1998) categorized different task-types that material developers can refer to when designing tasks for language use:

1. Listing

2. Ordering and sorting

3. Comparing and matching

4. Creative

5. Problem solving

6. Sharing personal experiences

For example, a listing task could involve students giving reasons why cats are good pets. An ordering and sorting task could involve classifying story pictures of a cat in the correct order. A comparing and matching task might consist of comparing different animals as pets. A problem solving task could involve ways to save money when taking care of a cat, whilst a sharing personal experiences task could concern telling a story about a cat. Willis (1998) points out that these task-types place different cognitive demands on learners, for example, a comparing task is considered to be more complex than a listing task because it requires the use of more complex L2 structures and syntax.

The effects of different task-types on L2 oral performance has been extensively evaluated within Asian contexts (see, for example, Mochizuki and Ortega, 2008; Robinson, 2001). However, as Robinson (2011) later states;

> because much empirical SLA research into the effects of tasks on learning has been, and continues to be, conducted in experimental settings, there is a clear need to examine the generalizability of implications drawn from this research to actual classroom language performance (p. 5).

In addition, Santos (2011) points out that 'there have been surprisingly few evaluations of task-based teaching' (p. 8), and those studies that have attempted this often publish accounts of tasks from teachers already convinced of its worth (for example, Willis & Willis, 2007).This appears to be an omission, for it is teachers themselves who implement task-based learning and teaching (TBLT), even though they may not always be conversant with the pedagogic research or convinced of its merits. This study attempts to bridge this gap

by reporting the views of teachers who taught an interactive 'comparing and matching' task that had been implemented into a newly-designed university curriculum.

Background

Since 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan has been voicing the need for English language instruction to be primarily concerned with improving Japanese learners' use of English. This was born out of dissatisfaction with traditional methods of language instruction which focused predominantly on grammar translation, reading and writing and was not conducive towards helping learners to achieve successful oral communication. MEXT was dissatisfied with the English speaking ability of Japanese university graduate students and the effect this would have on Japan's economy within today's globalized market place. In response to MEXT's aims, English language educators have been designing programs focused on oral L2 communication, and oral tasks have been used as one way to develop Japanese learners' use of English.

Issues relating to the use of oral tasks

Brown and Kikuchi (2009) reported how Japanese students entering university did not appear to have benefitted from the directives of MEXT because English language courses in senior high schools were still generally focused upon university entrance examinations which do not assess communicative competence but rather atomistic grammar, reading and writing. Consequently, their lack of exposure to English oral communication may result in them feeling unprepared to engage in communicative tasks which entail a lot of interaction in the L2.

Another issue relates to the language required to successfully complete tasks. Advocates of task-based approaches such as Willis and Willis (2007), claim that any linguistic difficulties a student may face during an interactive task can be overcome by the group collectively negotiating the meaning of what learners wish to say. Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis argues that this process of negotiation can facilitate acquisition. In other words, if an utterance is not understood during interaction, a learner can ask for clarification which causes the interlocutor to restructure their language. Through negotiation and the use of modified language, learners are able to consciously notice and understand new linguistic forms, a process which helps facilitate language learning (Schmidt, 1990). However, Seedhouse (1999) argues that in reality, learners often appear to perform in the opposite way, using only the minimum amount of L2 language because they 'appear to be so

concentrated on completing the task that linguistic forms are treated as a vehicle of minor importance' (p.154). Seedhouse (1999, p.153) illustrates this by providing an example of a task in which a group of learners are attempting to label a geometric model:

> L1: What?
> L2: Stop.
> L3: Dot?
> L4: Dot?
> L5: Point?
> L6: Dot?
> LL: Point point, yeah.
> L1: Point?
> L5: Small point.
> L3: Dot.

Clearly, if learners complete a task using as little language as possible, as shown in this example, then L2 interaction as a means to facilitate noticing and comprehension may prove to be an unrealistic process as this type of impoverished language will serve little benefit for them.

These claims are countered by Ellis (2009), who argues that although task interaction could generate this type of talk, it could prove beneficial if the learners are of beginner level proficiency as it provides them with the opportunity to 'make use of their limited resources and thus helping them to develop their strategic competence' (p.229). Furthermore, despite the limited L2 use shown in the example, the learners were able to negotiate, clarify and comprehend the meaning of 'dot' thus improving their collaborative knowledge. Ellis (2009) goes on to argue that depending on learners' proficiency, task interaction can generate much more lexically rich and complex L2 use.

Task-as-workplan vs. task-as-process

Another issue in terms of task implementation relates to the designers' or teachers' intention behind a task, known as task-as-workplan, compared to how a task is actually carried out by learners, referred to as task-as-process (Breen, 1989). Seedhouse (2005) argues that the language which a task is intended to induce (task-as-workplan) often does not occur as learners can respond to a task in a variety of ways. For example, learners' misinterpretations of the task's objectives or learners' own interpretations of a task could result in language which is not expected by the teacher, leading to unwanted outcomes. Seedhouse (2005, p.176) believes 'this can cause serious problems with validity in task-based research' to the point where differences with the intended language of a 'task-as-workplan'

and the language performance of a 'task-as-process' are so varied that it jeopardizes the reliability of task-based approaches due to the unpredictability of the language produced. Ellis (2009), on the other hand, points to numerous studies such as Robinson (2007) who has shown that task demands can be manipulated in a variety of ways with predictable effects on learners' fluency, accuracy and complexity of speech. For example, Robinson (2001) has shown how a complex task which has high cognitive demands in terms of its linguistic and functional requirements can increase the attention learners pay to their speech resulting in more accurate and complex L2 use compared to simpler task versions.

Given the issues put forward by researchers as to whether tasks can or cannot fulfill their potential, it was considered interesting to see what teachers in the Japanese context think about how effective tasks are at producing desired results. Although several other difficulties related to the implementation of TBLT have been identified in the broad Asian context, including institutional resistance, inadequate classroom environments and a lack of teacher training (Adams & Newton, 2009), the aim of this paper is simply to examine how the theoretical justifications of tasks can be related to teacher perceptions of them in use. By examining the views of teachers who taught a task to see whether the intended language (task-as-workplan) matched the students' performance (task-as-process), we hope to examine how teachers in Japan actually view tasks. This seems crucial because it is teachers themselves who implement TBLT and will only do so if they see the value of tasks and are willing to use them in their classrooms.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following questions:

1. How do teachers view a comparing and matching task-as-workplan?

2. How do teachers view a comparing and matching task-as-process?

<u>The teaching context</u>

This study took place at a bilingual university in Japan, in which an oral 'comparing and matching' task was implemented into a newly designed English intermediate-level speaking and writing curriculum. The syllabus and task was developed by a group of teachers at the university to help foster skills that would allow learners to communicate in English in different social contexts, for example, expressing opinions, describing and eliciting information. The speaking syllabus consisted of three two-week modules, each based on a different topic that was considered important for students studying at an international

university, for example, the environment and intercultural understanding. The chosen task was implemented in the second speaking module of the syllabus that focused on the topic of leadership. This module served to support students taking management classes, and therefore it was hoped that this task would have an authentic purpose. This module consisted of four speaking lessons that lasted 90 minutes each. Lessons one and two were devoted towards the content of leadership and building the speaking skills necessary to complete the task, for example, describing leadership qualities, expressing opinions and using vocabulary related to leadership (see appendix one for the vocabulary used). The task was performed in lessons three and four, where the students were expected to use the intended language to carry out a discussion about leadership. The six teachers who participated in this study were provided with the same detailed lesson plans for all four lessons and they all taught the task with approximately 20 students per class. It is therefore assumed that all the teachers carried out each lesson in a similar pattern.

The teachers interviewed were of different nationalities; one Scottish (T1), one Canadian (T2), one American (T3), one Romanian (T4), and two Japanese (T5) and (T6). They had been working at the University from 6 months to 5 years. All the teachers had experience using similar tasks prior to this study except for T4 and T5 and all were interviewed separately on a one-to-one basis with the researcher in a private room. All the teachers consented to their views being used anonymously hence we have employed terms such as T1 and T2 rather than using names. When students are mentioned, we have used pseudonyms.

The comparing and matching task

The task required students to work in groups of three. Each student was handed a profile of a student candidate who wanted to be leader of a university English social club. Each profile contained two statements regarding the candidate's leadership qualities. A list of 8 leadership vocabulary words was also provided on the whiteboard (see the appendix for sample profiles). During the pre-task stage, students were allocated ten minutes planning time in which they had to match a leadership vocabulary word to each statement (the students were previously taught the vocabulary in lessons one and two). After planning, the objective of the task was to compare the profiles and decide which candidate should be elected as leader. The students were encouraged to use leadership vocabulary and to agree or disagree with the rest of the group. As all the candidates possessed different leadership qualities, it was expected that this would facilitate discussion and interaction.

After the task, learners' attention was directed towards a variety of language that could be used to successfully complete it, for example:

- Describing a candidate's profile in 3rd person; *'Shunsuke / he started a computer company last year…'*

- Asking questions about other candidate's leadership qualities; *'Why do you think Shunsuke should be leader?'*

- Expressing opinions; *'I think Shunsuke is the best candidate because…'*

- Using leadership vocabulary; *'Kenta has tenacity because…'*

- Agreeing or disagreeing with other students' opinions; *'I disagree with you, I think Kenta should be leader because…'*

The students then practiced repeating the task in different groups during lesson three and were assessed on their task performance in lesson four.

Research Design

Semi-structured interview questions were designed to see what the teachers' intentions of the task were and whether the task was a success in eliciting the language intended. The use of interviews is well-established within qualitative research in ELT (e.g., Dornyei, 2007; Nunan, 1992; Richards, 2003) and it is argued that interviews can provide a rich source of qualitative data. Dornyei (2007) identifies three main types of interview: structured, unstructured and semi-structured. A structured interview employs a rigid design, which ensures that all interviewees are asked the same questions and there is no deviation from the interview schedule or spontaneous follow up questions possible. In this sense, structured interviews are similar to a questionnaire in spoken form (Dornyei 2007, p.135). An unstructured interview is clearly the opposite of this; the researcher will not follow a fixed interview schedule. S/he may begin with some general questions but will then allow the interview to go in the direction in which the interviewee's responses lead, clarifying as needed (Dornyei 2007, p.136). A semi-structured interview falls between these two extremes. The researcher prepares an interview guide with a series of questions and follow-up probes. Dornyei (2007) suggests that the semi-structured interview allows for the generation of rich data and this was the reason for their use in this study. It was felt that as the research investigated teacher's beliefs, a semi-structured format would allow us flexibility to explore what the interviewees felt about tasks as we could immediately follow up on and develop

points of interest as they occurred. At the same time, having some structure ensured that the data produced responses related to the research questions.

The questions were carefully designed so they did not contain information relating to the function of tasks such as 'promoting communication' etc. This discreteness was to avoid prompting teachers to use their knowledge and experience of tasks in general, which may be positive or negative and could influence their perceptions regarding the effects of this particular task. A series of questions were asked; however, for reasons of space, only the following are reported in this paper.

Q1:   'What you think this task aims students to do?' (task-as-workplan)
Q2:   'How do you think this task contributed in terms of the students'
       language development?' (task-as-process)

Each interview lasted approximately ten minutes and were all conducted after the initial semester had finished. The time lapse from the teachers' instruction of the task to their interviews was unavoidable as the end of the semester was the only time when all the teachers were available to be interviewed.

Analysis and Discussion

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVIVO 8 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2012) which simply allowed us to group the data into the categories of task-as-workplan and task-as-process more quickly and easily than a system of manual coding. This section begins with an analysis of the teachers who felt the task-as-workplan did not match the performance of the task i.e. task-as-process, followed by the teachers who felt it did.

Two teachers commented how the task-as-workplan did not match the task-as-progress. For example:

T1
Q1 (workplan): 'What this task is really asking the students to do is to ask lots of questions of the other students to try and get them to clarify what they're saying……and also to restate it to make sure they understand each other.'

Q2 (process): 'I don't think it will help particularly if it's not repeated. They really struggled with the restatement section. They tend to hear what the other student says and be too embarrassed to check that they're understanding it.'

T4
Q1 (workplan): 'I guess it's about the vocabulary, to be able to recognize and define a few words, also we asked them to compare different profiles…..and then in the end, give their own arguments, decide which is, is the best.'

Q2 (process): 'Erm, not really sure, again, I'm repeating myself but in terms of trying to use, reuse and recycle vocabulary in different contexts it is really helpful but I don't know about learning new things through this task'

T1 and T4's comments suggest that differences existed between the task-as-workplan and task-as-process which helps support Seedhouse's (2005) claim that tasks do not always facilitate language as intended by the teacher. There are a number of possible reasons why the task did not meet T1 and T4's expectations. For example, the lack of L2 speaking practice from students' previous high school education may have resulted in a reluctance to interact in the L2 when using a more communicative approach at the university level. Students' misinterpretations of the task objectives may also have resulted in a breakdown of the communicative aims of the task as viewed by teachers and students. Finally, the proficiency level of the learners may not have been advanced enough to enable them to successfully negotiate meaning in the L2, and as a result, they may have required more scaffolding prior to the task in order to be able to use the expected language successfully, for example, being able to provide opinions, or to agree and disagree and reason etc.

The other teachers however, (T2 and T3), provide evidence that the task-as-workplan matched the task-as-progress. For example:

T2
Q1 (workplan): 'I think that it really aims them to have a discussion, not as far as a debate, but they do need to be able to share information with each other and then make a decision.'

Q2 (process): 'I think that it's a confidence building activity because, whether they believed it or not…..they were able to get into a group and everybody was able to share the information from their card but then also were able to communicate to each other and finally make a decision.'

T3
Q1 (workplan): 'Aside from just practicing and talking in a group…..I guess making decisions about a person based on the statements.'

Q2 (process): 'I guess anytime they're practicing in discussion, I think that's a help…..I think that builds their vocabulary. And the supporting stuff….a   lot of that was stuff that they built up from the…um…during the module but, a reinforcement of those things.'

From T2 and T3's comments, we can see that the task-as-process matched the task-as-workplan as the task elicited the expected language, in that the students were able to have a discussion and make a decision.

In terms of the Japanese teachers (T5) and (T6), they both appeared to have the same views as T2 and T3 because they also commented on the way the aims of the task were successfully fulfilled by its outcome:

T5
Q1 (workplan): 'It involves being able to study and practice new words related to leadership skills or abilities…..and then, it could help students formulating their opinions and supporting their opinions.'

Q2 (process): 'Of course increasing vocabulary and be able to support their own opinions in English.'

T6
Q1 (workplan): 'Just simply they have to communication well, and listen to their members opinions or ideas and think about who is the best…..they have to exchange information to reach the goal.'

Q2 (process): 'In class they learn the vocabulary words and in the task they have to have natural real communication, interaction with their role so not like with the grammar lesson.'

The responses of the Japanese teachers suggest that the task contributed towards the expected language development as it successfully elicited the use of supporting opinions, vocabulary use and interaction in the L2.

The interview data shows that all of the teachers had similar views regarding the task-as-workplan. It suggests that they felt the aim of the task was to practice new vocabulary, ask questions, compare the profiles, and make a decision. These intentions match the description of the task outlined above. The teachers were divided however, in terms of the task-as-process and how it contributed towards language learning. T1 and T4 felt the outcome of the task was not as successful as they intended, whilst the other teachers suggested that it was. It appears that learners' previous educational backgrounds that were devoted predominantly towards grammar might not have been the contributing factor for the lack of oral interaction and language development in T1 and T4's classes, as the students in the other teacher's classes appeared open to L2 task interaction. An alternative factor could be slight differences within learners' proficiency in which certain students may have struggled with the language causing a communication breakdown. For example, T1 said:

'when there was a very low student and the other students couldn't understand what that student was saying, it created a very awkward situation because the task sort of halted because no one could understand it and then that student felt really embarrassed so I think it's very important to have enough scaffolding there.'

T1's comment regarding task interaction does not support Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis which claims the reverse i.e. that a breakdown in communication triggers negotiation of meaning amongst learners which helps to facilitate noticing and language learning, as well as the completion of a task. According to T1, this did not occur, and the lack of L2 use supports Seedhouse's (1999) claims that tasks can elicit impoverished language use which does not contribute towards acquisition. To prevent this situation from occurring, more scaffolding may be necessary, possibly through pre-task planning where learners could be provided with certain linguistic structures that could help them complete the task (Ellis, 2009, p.9). In this case, certain learners could be provided with extra guidance regarding the key task language (outlined earlier) during either the pre or post task stage which would help them to successfully complete subsequent versions of the task.

On the other hand, T2's opinion of the task's interactive function is more in line with Long's (1996) hypothesis:

> 'it forced them to negotiate and that's a skill that's maybe hard to teach but in that situation is naturally elicited so I thought that was one of the best things, to negotiate with each other and finally make a decision.'

T2's comment suggests that the task enabled learners to negotiate around communication problems and they were subsequently able to make a decision and complete the task. This supports Ellis' (2009) argument that higher proficiency learners have sufficient L2 resources to produce more elaborate speech and enable them to negotiate the meaning of misunderstood utterances to complete the task. In this case, the task's interactive nature would have helped facilitate language learning.

Conclusion

This paper reported how an interactive task was designed by teachers to foster the L2 communication skills of intermediate Japanese learners. The interview responses from the teachers who taught the task show how gaps can exist between task-as-workplan and task-as-process resulting in unwanted outcomes in terms of communication breakdowns. However, the data also shows how the aims of the task were successfully elicited during task interaction as the demands of this particular task prompted the learners to communicate with each other using the targeted language structures and vocabulary.These contrasting views are of particular interest considering the same task-type was used with the same level learners.

The deviation in task-as-workplan and task-as-process with this comparing and matching task seems to be, at least in part, a result of shy or weak learners. The implications

of this are thatmore scaffolding with the task-essential linguistic forms, perhaps during pre-task planning, would be useful to enable these learners to successfully complete the task. This may particularly be the case when using a comparing and matching task because asWillis (1998) points out, this task-type is more cognitively complex than a listing task or an ordering and sorting task. On the other hand, someteachers felt the task worked as intended. This may be due to the speaking proficiency of the learners who had sufficient ability in the L2 to successfully collaborate with each other to complete the task. Consequently, this study provides evidence that TBLT can work successfully in the eyes of teachers within a Japanese context, however, certain individual learner factors may require teachers to provide additional linguistic support for specific students in order to facilitate more successful L2 interaction.

Having said that, it is important to note that differences in teacher opinion regarding the use of this task may not be attributable to different learners or the scaffolding required. Differences in teachers' socio-cultural background or length of teaching experience may also influence their ability to use tasks as intended and manage group interaction. All the teachers in this study were of different nationalities (apart from T5 and T6 who were both Japanese) and they all had varying degrees of teaching experience. As a result, it could be suggested that differences in teacher background contributed to the deviations between task-as-workplan and task-as-process. For example, one might expect the experienced teachers to have more success in using the task to elicit the intended language. However, in this study, T5 commented favorably on how the aims of the task were realized through the learners L2 performance, yet T5 had no prior experience using tasks. This implies that teacher background might not be a factor that can hinder successful task-based teaching. It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate this issue but it certainly warrants future research.

In order for tasks to be successfully implemented within English educational contexts in Japan, it is crucial to obtain the views of more Japanese teachers regarding their perceptions of tasks as contributing to the development of L2 speech. Using semi-structured interviews or other qualitative methods of data collection such as teacher diaries would seem a sensible way to approach such research. As this study only focused on the use of a comparing and matching task, it would also be of interest for future studies to explore teachers' views using different task types outlined in Willis (1998) to see whether certain tasks are more successful at eliciting intended language than others. This could usefully be extended to other contexts in Japan such as investigating the views of high school teachers.

In this study the university teachers, on the whole, confirmed the value of an oral comparing and matching task as a means to foster L2 communication within a Japanese

educational context. Although as this was a small-scale study, further research with larger sample sizes and in different contexts are required in order to fully justify this claim.

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Acknowledgments

Appendix

Task materials

Instructions: Allocate one profile to each student. Students should describe their student profile to the group and discuss what leadership qualities each candidate has. The group then decides which candidate they think is best qualified for the role of leader of a university English social club.

Qualities that make a good leader of a university English social club:

Vision	Team-worker	Confident	Popular
Persuasiveness	Good at deal-making	Tenacity	English fluency

Profile A

NAME: Kenji	AGE: 21
"I want to create an English Club where students can study English online anytime, with their own computer and brand new computer programs."	
Quality:	
"I like speaking English. Last year I won a prize for the best English presentation in my year."	
Quality:	

Profile B

NAME: Kenta	AGE: 19
"I am a member of the soccer club at University. We have 32 members, and we do everything together, as a team. If one of the members is in trouble, we help him or her, and they all help me."	
Quality:	
"Last year, I was chosen 'Best Player' in the university's soccer team by my team-mates. This made me really happy, because two years ago I broke my leg, and the doctor said I would never play soccer again.	
Quality:	

Profile C

NAME: Ayu	AGE: 20
"Some people say singing in front of lots of people is scary, but I think it is the best feeling in the world. I have a good voice and I can sing and talk in front of anybody."	
Quality:	
"I love singing. I go to karaoke 4 times a week with my friends, and I have hundreds of friends."	
Quality:	