

Tasks as a vehicle for increased student engagement with content

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Oral Presentation

Abstract

We teach courses in language teaching methodology for student teachers of English. In this presentation we report on how we changed our approach to teaching content in the courses. In the past, students prepared for seminars by reading texts and answering questions, and shared their answers during seminars. We felt a dissatisfaction with this approach, mainly because there was no clear outcome of the seminar and few indications of students transferring gained knowledge were visible. Borrowing established principles from an approach to language teaching called task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2018), we created new seminar activities. These activities require students to actively process reading materials prior to the seminar, and during the seminar work with others towards a clearly defined goal. For example, students individually collate information about three assigned readings into a Venn diagram before the seminar. During the seminar students compare and contrast their diagrams. Finally, they create a new diagram based on their shared understanding. In the presentation we give examples of tasks that we use in our courses and of educational benefits they may confer, for example that they require a deeper cognitive engagement with the content. We also relate our new approach to theoretical underpinnings such as desirable difficulties (Bjork & Bjork, 2020) and collaborative learning (William, 2017).

References

- Bjork, R.A., & Bjork, E.L. (2020). Desirable difficulties in theory and practice. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 9(4), 475-479.
- Ellis, R. (2018). Reflections on task-based language teaching. *Multilingual Matters*.
- William, D. (2017). *Embedded formative assessment* (2nd ed.). Solution Tree Press.