Design & Completion of Online Tasks

Teacher Idealisations & Learner Realisations

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Value of Online Tasks in Language Learning Perceptions: Teachers vs Students

- Two approaches to investigating online tasks identified by Chapelle (1999). They rely on:
  - Teachers’ judgements of the relationship between the 2nd language task & the tasks that learners might encounter outside the classroom
  - Detailed observation of the language that learners produce during the 2nd language task

- Third perspective on tasks proposed by this study investigates:
  - The match between the expectations of the task designer and the expectations of a learner who undertakes these tasks
Online Tasks in ESL Curriculum

Research questions:

What are the areas of agreement & disagreement between the perception of a task by a teacher & perception of a task by a student?

How does accentuation of specific aspects of tasks make students see them as a valuable learning experience and result in their successful completion?
The Setting

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) - ESL (English as a second language) provider to migrants in Melbourne, Australia

AMES language centres are equipped with networked computers & students have unlimited access to:

- Computer labs of 20 – 22 networked computers for teacher-led instruction
- Networked open access set-ups called Independent Language Centres for students’ independent before & after hours computer access
- Multipurpose Room with 6 wireless laptops (city centre)

Applications
- Software mainly for English language study – from text-based grammar practice programs to full multi-media (video/audio)
- Online platforms : VILC (Virtual Independent Language Centre) & WebCT

Main curriculum
- CSWE = Certificate in Spoken and Written English (Levels: 1 2 3 4)

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The Participants: Five Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Computer literacy skills on a scale (poor) 1 – 5 (excellent)</th>
<th>Prior exposure to Web-based CALL on a scale (poor) 1 – 5 (excellent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Participants: Five Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Computer literacy skills on a scale (poor) 1-5 (excellent)</th>
<th>Language level (ISLPR)</th>
<th>Certificate (CSWE) level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection

**Teachers**

Prior to study teachers asked to collect links to Websites to be used in their task creation. Tasks related to the CSWE level they were teaching.

Met as a group to create tasks (each one for her group) & talked about the process & discussed each other’s tasks. This was audio recorded.

Each teacher interviewed separately to reflect on the activity. Interviews audio recorded, then transcribed.

**Students**

Students’ interaction with computers while working on tasks observed.

Students interviewed individually on task completion. Interviews audio recorded, then transcribed.
### Interview questions adopted in the face to face interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you make your decisions as to what will be of interest or/and value to your students when creating online tasks?</td>
<td>Do you find online tasks interesting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the essential elements of a good online task?</td>
<td>What makes a task interesting/valuable to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What motivates the learners to complete the tasks?</td>
<td>What motivates you to complete the tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you make sure students know what is expected of them when working on the tasks?</td>
<td>How do you know what is expected of you when you work on the tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which element/s will be of most value/interest to your students in this task?</td>
<td>Which element/s was/were of most value to you in this task?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analytical Categories

Three major focus areas emerged as influencing the practices adopted by the teachers and their learners.

- ** Appropriateness of online tasks and motivation to complete them** (to what extent the design of online tasks by teachers matches their execution by students)

- **Clarity of tasks leading to their successful completion** (how accentuation of specific aspects of tasks makes students see them as a valuable learning experience and results in their successful completion)

- **Personally meaningful task elements: teachers vs. learners** (to establish possible areas of agreement and disagreement between the perceptions of a task by a teacher and perception of a task by a student)
New Emergent Themes: Teachers

Appropriateness of online tasks and motivation to complete them

How do you make your decisions as to what will be of interest or/and value to your students when creating online tasks?

What are the essential elements of a good online task?

What motivates the learners to complete the tasks?

- Task relevance
- Task goal
- Task authenticity and learner autonomy
- Task structure and integration within the curriculum
- Task difficulty and computer literacy acquisition
- Task motivation and completion
  - Task assessment and link to students’ needs
New Emergent Themes: Students

Appropriateness of online tasks and motivation to complete them

Do you find online tasks interesting?
What makes a task interesting/valuable to you?
What motivates you to complete the tasks?

- Task feedback
- Authentic audience
Task (1)

Certificate IV in Spoken and Written English – Mixed Focus

Task: Computers and Girls

This task integrates the following modules from your CSWE IV:

S4FS01 Can use a range of study and research skills.
S4FS11 Can read and interpret multiple-choice questions.
S4VE11/FS10 Can read an information text.
S4FS17 Can write an essay (preparation).
S4VE08 Can participate in a group discussion.

Instructions

Use the link to Learning Resources http://literacynet.org/cnnsf/home.html

Click on Story Archives and choose Computers and Girls.

Click on Story and read the text (or listen to the audio recording or watch the video).

Do the activities as listed on the left hand side.

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Read the instructions under *Your Turn* (You might post your own comments to the site too – This is optional.)

**Task (1)**

Name: Joy  
Date: May 27, 2001  
Country: China

Response: Although it is natural for girls and boys to have different interests, the computer has become more popular and more important nowadays. Learning computer skills is necessary. Now, people find that girls have less interest in using the computer than boys. I think it would be useful to create games for girls. Let them have the same chance to become familiar with the computer.

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Name: Donna Haskins  
Date: March 30, 2001  
Country: Corona, CA USA

Response: Boys might be more interested in computers because boys are more mechanical than girls. On the other hand, I think girls are more verbal than boys. Boys are more into figuring out how things work, and downloading music. Girls would use the computer for writing letters, or talking to friends.

Choose one of the comments posted to the site and prepare a short oral presentation justifying your agreement or disagreement with it. You will present it in class then discuss it with your classmates.
Task (1)

1. What are some of the reasons why boys might be more interested in computers that girls?
2. List some of the things that might be done to get girls more interested in computers.

C

Post-task activity

Write an essay on “Computers and Girls” based on the story as well as the related links to other Websites as listed underneath the story.

PS

Copy and paste the Activity Instructions and your response onto your disk.

Save it as a Word document entitled: computers. Give a copy to your teacher.

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Task (2)

- Certificate 4 Further Study - Competency 10: Can read an information text
  - Steps
    - Go to the following Internet site
      http://www.topics-mag.com
Task (2)

- Explore the site and answer the following questions:
  - Who is the site for?
  - What kind of topics does it cover? (List at least 4)
  - Who writes the stories/texts for this site?
  - What does current issue mean?
    » Name at least 2 of the topics in the current issue
    » Where can you find previous issues of this magazine (Under what heading?)
    » Under what heading will you find information about what people think about this site?
Task (2)

You said it!

READ what you, the readers, have said about topics featured in this magazine.

HAVE YOUR SAY! Send us YOUR ideas.

Adventure  Advertising  Body Art
Cell Phones  Cheating  Cloning
Cultural Customs  Dress Codes  Family
Food  Genetically Modified Food  Gun Control
Invasion of Privacy  Media Violence  Pokémon
Smoking  Special Moments  Technology
The Way We Are  Working Teenagers  Weddings

Please use this form to send us your comments.

Name:
E-mail:
Country:

I would like TOPICS Online Magazine to reply.

Opinion:

Send to TOPICS  Clear

If this form does not work, e-mail us at: topics_esl@yahoo.com

Return to: Home Page

TOPICS Online Magazine ©1997-2003 - topics_readers@yahoo.com

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Task (2)

• Explore a topic of interest to you on this site and write a paragraph about it. (What it is about and why you like it)
• Type it up and save onto a floppy disk
• When you have finished, print it out and present it to your teacher
New Emergent Themes: Teachers

Clarity of tasks leading to their successful completion

How do you make sure students know what is expected of them when working on the tasks?

The role of instruction, assistance and pointers within the tasks

“The instructions have to be very clear. Initially you have to take them through the instructions, make them get used to how you set out your instructions. I know they know my intention is that they follow my instructions. If I think some students are capable of it but others may not be, or will be if they get assistance, then I often put students working together. If you don’t know you can call on me but also you can call on the person sitting next to you. In the computer room I wander up and down and I sit with them if they have difficulties….I hope that through that they get to the point where they see the point of it all”.

“At the beginning I always recap on things we’ve done before. Then I go through the instructions. Instructions should be short indicating with italics or bolding … .their attention is drawn there as the important things”.

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New Emergent Themes: Students

Clarity of tasks leading to their successful completion

How do you know what is expected of you when you work on the tasks?

“What the teacher wants me to do is always clear. Teacher gives instructions on paper so I know what to do. Before the task the teacher explains what is expected, she gets us open the site. This is very helpful (Tina). You follow instructions so it’s always clear (Alex). Clear because of the way the instructions were written. She is using simple words (Boris). Clear as you get instructions, if not clear I can ask her (Suma). I know what is expected as the teacher explains and she is there to help. Because we do it before and another thing is we get instructions and before we start the teacher explains (Barbara)"."
New Emergent Themes: Teachers & Students

Personally meaningful task elements

Which element/s will be of most value/interest to your students in this task?
Which element/s was/were of most value to you in this task?

• Authenticity of online resources vs. language practice
  – The teachers stressed the importance of authenticity of resources as the basis of their tasks. One of the online tasks as given to the students consisted of two parts: Part A, where the students were sent to an authentic Website to read the Editorial Section to familiarise themselves with the film before they go to see it. Part B, required the students to access an ESL site to listen to a topic-related story, then do a series of self-correcting exercises before they write a paragraph for the teacher. Comparing the two parts, the teacher was fully convinced that Part A would be of more value to the students as, as the teacher put it:
  – … it is real… I use this site myself and I think they can use it now too…

However, Tina (student) thought that Part A of this task was not necessary. She highly valued Part B saying:
  – I prefer the second part. It gave the chance for me to hear…I didn’t read the text but I hear the story and then I had to answer questions. If I can answer questions and then check the answers, I’m happy to do it… I think that listening is very important for me. Part A, no listening, just reading the text … it’s not necessary because after the film we know the story.

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New Emergent Themes: Teachers & Students

Personally meaningful task elements

Which element/s will be of most value/interest to your students in this task?
Which element/s was/were of most value to you in this task?

• Language practice vs. social interaction
  – The teacher’s (Betty) perception was that the students would value most the possibility of practising the language, which was based on a current topic and allowed to do language exercises online with the possibility of receiving immediate feedback. The student (Alex), however, repeatedly stressed the value of the social aspect of the task. To him it was authentic, interesting and valuable because he could post his own opinion to the site and share his own experiences with other students. This is how he put it:

  – “… you can share what you are thinking about, own opinion about the topic. Other people may reply to it. This makes it very interesting … contact with the others. WebCT discussion is also interesting because there are other people there too. Presenting in class… very good for your speaking. It’s got to be done well as you’ve got the audience there”.

  – The teacher thought the student would be most of all interested in the use of the language and further development of computer literacy. The teacher saw posting messages / comments to Websites as valuable from the point of view of the focus on form, attention to language, not as a social aspect as expressed by her student.
Discussion

- Mismatch between what the teachers perceive as of most value to their students when engaging in online tasks and what their learners see as most valuable.

- Teachers’ focus is on meaning (reading and listening comprehension) and form (grammar exercises) based on authentic or semi authentic sources of information while their students’ interest is their language development primarily via social online interaction.

- It seems imperative to make teachers aware of such findings so that they could alter their perceptions and adjust teaching practices.

- As the present study has shown, teachers have already enriched their teaching practices by incorporating online tasks, what is needed is a better understanding of what their students’ expectations are.
Conclusion

• The role of networked computers as instruments for social interaction seems peripheral to the teachers in the present study, which does not match the perceptions of their students.

• The teachers in the present study have not reached the socio-collaborative stage of CALL yet (Warschauer, 2000). Although they have adopted a new approach by designing pedagogically sound online tasks that draw on authentic Web resources, they have not incorporated computer mediated communication or online collaboration to go with it.

• If, as Warschauer & Kern (2002) point out,

  “our goal is to help students enter into new authentic discourse communities, and if those discourse communities are increasingly located on-line, then it seems appropriate to incorporate on-line activities for their social utility as well as for their perceived particular pedagogical value.”