

Beyond the course books: Thinking tasks for Intermediate ESL learners

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Presenter: Pornsawan Brawn

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The four dimensions of productive pedagogies are:

- intellectual quality
- relevance
- a supportive classroom environment
- recognition of difference

1 Intellectual Quality

A hierarchy of levels of thinking, (James Moffett, 1968 - Teaching the Universe of Discourse, Houghton Mifflin, Boston)

higher levels of thinking

theorise

hypothesise

generalise

report

record

low level of thinking

2 Relevance

= what we do, materials we use to connect classroom events to what is happening outside classroom. Students learn best if their intention to learn is aroused.

2 Relevance

- Materials we select should:
- have a clear sense of direction and purpose
- can build upon what they already know
- involve the students in active participation, using their own language and cultural images to help them understand

3 A supportive classroom environment

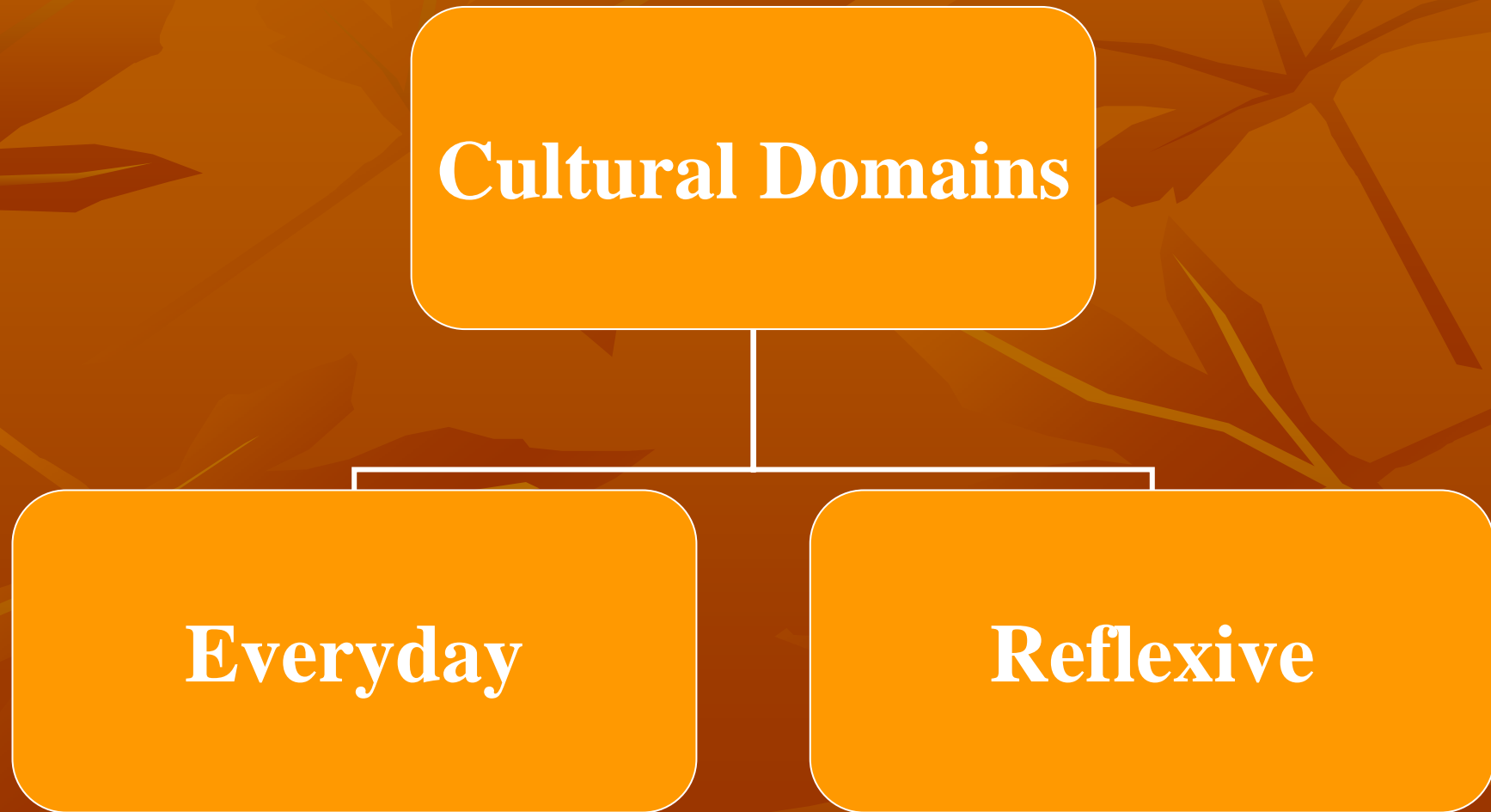
- This stages and scaffolds students learning so that they are able to build on what they already know.

4 Recognition of difference

- As teachers we must plan to ensure that our different students are being able to bring their own funds of knowledge to bear on classroom learning tasks.

Adapted from *WIR Industry Research: Media Literacy* (No authors indicated)

Cultural Domains



Everyday

Reflexive

Constructions of activities and things

Field

Commonsense knowledge
(relevant to everyday life)

Critical knowledge
(relevant to reflexive
learning)

Everyday

Reflexive

Constructions of self and others

Tenor

Community roles
(characterised by
familiarity, solidarity,
shared perspectives)

Multiple roles
(characterised by
opposition and difference)

Everyday

Reflexive

Constructions of texts

Mode

Language as part of reality
(as in face to face
conversation, language in
action)

Language for challenging
constructions
(understanding of reality)

This handout is from the work by Carol Numrich and John Beaumont
American Language Program, Columbia University
Title: Critical Thinking Tasks for Low-Proficiency ESOL students

TYPES OF INFERENCE

1. Inferencing attitudes, feelings, points of view
2. Inferencing information not explicit in the text
3. Inferencing situational context
4. Inferencing word meaning from context

PITFALLS IN WRITING INFERENCE QUESTIONS

1. Question is really “literal level”
2. Question is really “applied level”
3. Question is “low-level” inference
4. Question can be answered with visual support
5. Questions are poorly designed

1. Question is really "literal level"

- vocabulary repeated - literal
- paraphrase of text - literal

2. Question is really "applied level"

- no information in the text to answer the question (relies on student's background knowledge)
- asks students opinion rather than comprehension of the text
- asks for interpretation of the text that is beyond comprehension

3. Question is "low-level" inference

- requires putting two pieces of information together from the text
- answer can be determined by paraphrasing

4. Question can be answered with visual support

- pictures or drawings make the question literal

5. Questions are poorly designed

- illogical answers
- language issues

A SEQUENCE OF CRITICAL THINKING TASKS

1.OBSERVING

Looking at subject matter from the students' world.

Look at... Listen to

2 IDENTIFYING ASSUMPTIONS

- Sharing background experiences and knowledge.
- Expressing opinions
- Recognising attitudes and values
- *Tell why/ what....?*
What do you know about....?

3. ORAGANIZING DATA

- Classifying /ordering information
- Categorizing information
- Comparing and contrasting information
Categorize....
Compare/contrast.....

4. INTERPRETING DATA

- Making inferences
- Interpreting meaning from text
- Predicting from the title/predicting outcomes
- Hypothesizing/theorising

Why/What do you think ..

Based on the text, why....?

Do you think the author would agree or disagree...?

5 INQUIRING FURTHER

- Surveying the public
 - Identifying a specialist and interviewing
 - Conducting research in a library or on the Internet
- Conduct a survey of...
report... Interview....
Investigate/Research.. and
report*

6. ANALYSING & EVALUATING

- Synthesizing two or more pieces of information
- Critiquing
- Reflecting on new ideas
- Making logical conclusions
- Re-evaluating assumptions

Critique

*Look back at what you ...
and re-evaluate...*

*Which is more interesting?
Why?*

*On a scale of 1-6, rate the
following*

7. DECISION MAKING

- Proving solutions/
problem solving
- Volunteering in the
community
- Participating in
workshops/events