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# **Taking the Web to task**

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Although the concept of tasks remains central to second language teaching and assessment, the role of tasks within online learning remains little explored. On the one hand, researchers who focus specifically on tasks (Bygate, Skehan and Swain 2001) have ignored the influence of computers in the classroom; on the other hand, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) theorists such as Warschauer, Debski and Levy have minimised tasks as a central point of departure for innovative curriculum design. Nonetheless, as Hoven (1999) and Felix (1999) argue, task-based language teaching (TBLT) can underpin much of practicable work in CALL. That is, focused study on the nexus between TBLT and CALL has the potential to examine the way learners utilise tasks to acquire a second language, improve our design of online language learning environments and contribute to our understanding of tasks themselves.

To frame both research and practice of CALL in adult migrant settings, Corbel (1998) listed a six-part strategy in *Instructional technology strategy for the Adult Migrant English Program*:

- 1 Carry out a research program that investigates the relationship between instructional technology and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) client groups.
- 2 Establish a set of best practice standards in delivery and infrastructure based on the research and current Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA)/provider relationships.
- 3 Establish a set of computing competencies relating to Instructional Technology that reflect the needs of the program, provider and staff.
- 4 Ensure provision of a coherent set of training options based on computing competencies, utilising a range of delivery mechanisms that reflect teacher needs and best practice.
- 5 Ensure the provision of timely, flexible resources for teachers and learners, linked to the Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE). (The CSWE is a curriculum framework established in Australia in 1992 that consists of four certificates. For each certificate, the CSWE guidelines contain an introduction to syllabus design, a description of the competencies at each level, a general explanation of competency-based assessment, benchmark tasks and texts.)
- 6 Establish an AMEP website to keep all AMEP stakeholders informed of strategy implementation.

Based on the first of these strategies, a project that evaluated current and potential use of Internet-based activities (Taylor and Corbel 1998) found that the most students who do not use the Internet frequently in the AMEP have not had the opportunity to learn the necessary skills. However, these same students are extremely keen to access Internet resources and are

highly motivated to learn how to navigate this environment. The project also identified the need for teachers to develop skills regarding the integration of face-to-face, paper-based and online techniques to improve student learning via effective teaching techniques, and that further work needs to address the creation of a 'coherent set of training options based on computing competencies, utilising a range of delivery mechanisms that reflect teacher needs' (Taylor and Corbel 1998: 33). Such research should be orientated towards actual teaching practices.

Work by Chapelle (1999) that makes a distinction between *task as workplan* and *task as process* established the theoretical framework for our investigation. Such a view of tasks established the basis for our data collection. Using an ethnographic approach, we used participant observation, focus groups and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Participants in this study consisted of online task designers, specialist multimedia instructors and students who used VILC (Virtual Independent Learning Centre) on a regular basis. The data was analysed through a cyclical, reflective process that demanded each researcher be involved in the construction, revision and defence of interpretations.

Our report is organised into three additional chapters. In Chapter Two, we identify central issues in online task-based language teaching. The review, of course, focuses on the role of tasks within language learning specifically but it is necessarily extended to encompass online activities in other fields. In particular, we expand on Project-based CALL, in which tasks are set as a way to promote communication amongst small groups, as a third area of review. Chapter Three describes the historical context for task-usage within the AMEP, and presents VILC as a case study to study online task-based activities. The chapter reports on an investigation of task designer, specialist multimedia teachers and learners in regards to actual task usage. Specifically, feedback from task designers is used to explore the concept of *task as workplan*; observations of learners serve to better understand *task as process*; and a focused discussion with specialist teachers provides insights into the role of *task within project-based activities*. Chapter Four applies key findings of the study to the teaching context, and describes revised procedures for creating task activities. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2

# Tasks in online learning

Before examining the role of tasks within an adult migrant language learning institution, this chapter examines current thinking about online tasks in both general and second language contexts. The chapter is presented in four sections. First, it provides an overview of tasks within mainstream online education. The trend towards constructivist and project-based approaches to learning are illustrated with a description of Webquest (Dodge 1997) activities. Following this, TBLT is discussed with specific reference to task definition. After that, current theoretical perspectives in CALL are presented, and it is suggested there is a need to better describe CALL programs as being in *transition*. The fourth section of the chapter explores online task research and evaluation, and recommends that work from Chapelle (1999) serve as a basis for investigation. The chapter concludes with a general discussion of the role of tasks in online learning.

### General trends in the use of tasks in mainstream online learning

To contextualise our discussions on TBLT later in this report, we first set out a framework to describe approaches to instruction and the role of tasks in general online education. We present computer use as progressing along a continuum that goes from unrestricted network access for 'websurfing' to one that embraces a highly structured, step-by-step approach (Table 1). Each approach has a distinct purpose and is supported by different underlying theories of learning.

**Table 1: Key approaches to online instruction**

The use of networked computer resources	Attributes	Related learning theory and role of tasks
'Web-surfing'	Use of the online materials is unstructured and self-directed; individual understanding is emphasised	<b>Discovery:</b> As a general rule, tasks are not strictly set because students are seen to learn best when they are motivated to find, organise and use materials that suit their individual interests and needs (Bruner 1985)
Collaborative environment	Complex, collaborative projects are facilitated by the use of online technologies; little imposed structure	<b>Social constructivism:</b> Small groups work together to achieve an ill-defined goal (Driscoll 2000)
Resource centre	Online resources serve to compliment and assist learning in an area of interest	<b>Expository:</b> Tasks are 'meaningful' when associated with what is already understood; appropriate resources strengthen context and deepen associations (Gagné and Driscoll 1988)

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The use of networked computer resources	Attributes	Related learning theory and role of tasks
Independent learning centre	Online resources relate to a specific course alongside guidelines that correspond to specified curriculum levels ('resources', rather than 'courses')	<b>Elaboration:</b> Tasks are set in such a way that they develop specific abilities and become more challenging as understanding in a specific subject area matures (Ausubel 1963; Reigeluth 1987)
Programmed instruction	Following a carefully defined set of instructions, the learner completes a set of tasks to achieve a specific outcome ('courses' rather than 'resources')	<b>Structured:</b> Instructional tasks are sequenced to become systematically more complex; learning goals are clearly stated and outcomes are clear (eg Jonassen, Hannum and Tessmer 1999)

In each of these approaches to the use of online resources, the concept of task shifts. For the web surfer, a task is largely a self-directed and perhaps ill-defined activity, whereas the learner following a program of sequenced instruction would encounter a set of carefully constructed discrete activities. Online tasks vary according to purpose, underlying perspectives of the learner and availability of computer resources.

Overall, the general trend in online learning is towards the use of networked environments. Educators are increasingly making use of the global computer network: for both individual and collaborative learning, interconnected technologies allow unprecedented ways to share and access mutually available information. Project-based learning provides one way to fully utilise the networked environment. Based loosely on the principles of social constructivism (for an overview, see Driscoll 2000: 373–96), students operating within a project-based syllabus work in small groups to achieve a common objective. Together, they are directed to identify information needs, locate appropriate resources, extract and organise relevant information from each source and then synthesise the information into productive uses (Land and Greene 2000). In this style of learning, McGrath and Berdahl (1998) saw that small groups use computers in three ways: (a) as information systems when they need to access large amounts of information; (b) as task performance structuring systems as they carry out complex cognitive activities; or (c) as communication systems, either synchronously or asynchronously, if they need to communicate extensively to complete a task.

Webquest activities provide one of the best examples of online project-based learning. Around the globe, educators have created more than 3000 Webquest sites for use in primary, secondary, tertiary and adult learning situations (Dodge 2000). The Webquest framework provides a way to contextualise tasks and make them meaningful beyond the classroom. Here, tasks are defined simply as 'what the learner will have done at the end of the exercise' (Dodge 1997) and thus is the end result, or product, that drives the entire learning activity. Examples of tasks in Webquest activities include a mystery to be solved, a personal insight to be articulated, the production of a letter, a presentation of an oral report, or anything else that requires that learner to *transform* information that has been gathered

(Author 1999). The tasks can be completed either individually or in groups. Dodge (1997) has established six 'building blocks' to frame the development of Webquest activities:

- 1 **Introduction:** Establishment of the background and context for the activity;
- 2 **Tasks:** Description of a series of achievable outcomes;
- 3 **Process:** Based on the use of information sources drawn from authentic online sites, a step-by-step description of what the learners need to do to accomplish the tasks;
- 4 **Resources:** A list of pre-selected web pages that will help learners accomplish the tasks and avoid surfing aimlessly;
- 5 **Evaluation:** A description of the criteria that are needed to assess performance standards; and
- 6 **Conclusion:** A prompt to help learner reflection on the activity and how it may be applicable to other domains.

To illustrate, consider the Webquest activity in creative problem solving for advanced ESL students (Pawan 2000). In the Introduction, Pawan establishes the problem solving context by telling the story of how Alexander the Great figured out how to untie the Gordian knot. The aim of this Webquest is to challenge students to be creative in their own problem solving, and four Tasks are set out: (1) to get to know problem-solving techniques; (2) to apply such techniques to two intercultural challenges; (3) to present the solutions to other members of the class; and (4) to apply the techniques to real-world, individual problems.

Pawan (2000) places the Resources under the Process section of the Webquest activity. Here, the ESL learners are guided through five 'engagement activities' that direct them to use authentic online materials in small discussion groups. In the fourth engagement activity, for example, students are asked to adopt certain roles and make a presentation to the entire class about problem solving. In the Evaluation section, a table is presented which lists each engagement activity and a set of criteria. The evaluation activity is judged on a four-part scale that ranges from 'beginning' to 'exemplary'. To reach the beginning stage of the presentation, for example, 'members of the group are able to keep presentations within the time limit'. Finally, the Conclusion of the Webquest provides a list of suggestions and links that students could use to further explore problem solving.

Although not included in Pawan (2000), one additional 'building block' of a Webquest activity is a Teacher Page (Author 1999) that includes a description of the curriculum standards, resources, and teaching notes intended for other educators who may want to use the activity. The inclusion of a Teacher Page, it can be argued, is particularly suitable for a group of online material writers who share a common curriculum framework.

## Task-based language learning

Before discussing the role of tasks in online language learning, it is useful to have a perspective on task-based approaches in the English language

classroom. The role of tasks gained prominence with the shift from structural to communicative approaches to language learning. Second language acquisition (SLA) theorists saw tasks as a key component in classroom activities. In an early definition, Long (1985: 89) listed a number of common daily activities that could be called a 'task' and concluded that it 'meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between'. Breen (1987) specifically highlighted language learning in his definition of tasks:

*... any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. 'Task' is therefore assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning – from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making. (Breen 1987: 23)*

One aspect of this definition is that it acknowledges the potential differences between what is planned and what actually takes place in a classroom. Breen, therefore, heightened the role of the learner by emphasising a view that 'tasks-in-process' could be observed within a classroom environment.

Nunan (1989) refocused attention to classroom learning when he argued that 'meaning' rather than 'linguistic structure' was the basis of task-based language teaching. He wrote that a communicative task was:

*... a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. (Nunan 1989: 10)*

Nunan's interpretation of task-based language teaching is notable in that it makes a distinction between two types of tasks. According to Nunan, 'real-world tasks' are those that require learners to practise tasks which approximate behaviours expected in real world settings. 'Pedagogical tasks', on the other hand, are those that are grounded in second language acquisition (SLA) theory and thus may not necessarily reflect 'real-world' tasks.

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993: 11–12) draw out two key attributes of tasks. First, they note that tasks need to be *goal* oriented so that learners know that they are expected to arrive at an outcome and have a sense of what needs accomplishing. Secondly, tasks need to be a *workplan* or an *activity*. That is, learners need to participate actively as they carry out a task themselves. Combined, the two features of goal and activity point to a need for learners to take initiative whenever they encounter frustrations as they try to communicate in a second language.

Skehan (1998) wrote that tasks had the following attributes:

*... meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome. (Skehan 1998: 38)*

Skehan’s definition focuses task purpose to content over form, and emphasises the need to link an activity to the world beyond the classroom. Task completion and performance also assume a greater centrality. With this in mind, Skehan (1998; 2000) investigated how variations in task characteristics – the degree of familiarity, task structure, complexity of operations, the depth of knowledge and differentiated outcomes – each affect task performance.

In a recent summary definition, Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001: 12) define a pedagogical task as:

*... a focused, well-defined activity, relatable to pedagogic decision making, which requires learners to use language, with an emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective, and which elicits data which may be the basis for research.*

In this definition, it is notable that the two terms ‘task’ and ‘activity’ are interchangeable; that is, unlike the mainstream Webquest framework, tasks are not sub-section of an overall activity but rather are seen to be one and the same thing. By putting the two terms on equal footing, it is potentially difficult for material writers to ‘scaffold’ the steps needed for a learner to reach an overall learning goal. Confusion about the hierarchical nature of guided learning activities and related tasks could certainly result in poor materials design.

## Current theoretical perspectives on CALL

In line with trends in general education, CALL educators are also making an increased use of networked environments in the classroom. Warschauer (2000a) provides perspective on this trend with his overview of stages in the field (Table 2).

**Table 2: Three stages of CALL**

	<b>Structural</b>	<b>Communicative</b>	<b>Integrative</b>
Initiated	1970s	1980s	1990s
Technology	Mainframe computers	PCs	Multimedia and Internet
Methodology	Grammar-translation; audiolingual	Communicative language teaching	Content-based; ESP and EAP
View of language	Structural (a formal system)	Cognitive (mentally constructed system)	Socio-cognitive (developed in social interaction)
Main activities	Drill and practice	Communicative exercises	Authentic discourse
Learning objective	Accuracy	Fluency	Agency

(based on Warschauer 2000a: 6)

Seen best as a continuum rather than as strict categories, Warschauer’s (2000) framework illuminates the role of computers within overall trends in second language theory and learning. As with audio-lingual approaches to

teaching, Structural CALL too had a strong emphasis on grammar. Computers were used to help students gain fluency as they were able to vary the speed of output.

In line with a shift away from audio-lingual approaches, the intent of Communicative CALL was to help students develop fluency through guided use of the target language. Exercises in Communicative CALL sought to help students develop their own mental models through use of the target language. In a typical study, Esling (1991) created a series of task-based CALL activities in which students were directed to describe photographs, give directions or express an opinion. Students corresponded and compared answers over an email network between universities.

Integrative CALL seeks to make full use of the Internet as a social, networked environment (eg Barson and Debski 1996; Debski 2000; Warschauer 2000). Instructors promote close ties between learning processes, objectives and a student ownership of the outcomes. As with mainstream project-based learning, social interaction and small group interaction are highlighted. Authentic discourse provides the basis for learning material. Students are taught to harness the power of online publishing to produce their own texts. Fostering learner *agency*, or 'the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our own decisions and choices' (Murray 1997: 126 cited in Warschauer 2000b: 524), is a primary goal of Integrative CALL.

The key distinction between Communicative CALL and Integrative CALL is that, in the former, learner choice and self-management of activity are driven by task-based approaches to syllabus design. At its most liberal interpretation, a syllabus in Integrative CALL simply represents a 'dynamic blueprint' where learning occurs through 'accidents' generated by projects (Barson 1999). In contrast, a syllabus in Communicative CALL is likely to be discrete and related to a set of curricular guidelines that have been defined in advance of learner needs (Corbel 1999).

Although Warschauer stresses that such stages fall along a continuum, we suggest there is a need to describe the state of the field as 'Transitional' CALL. In our minds, CALL is an area of applied linguistics that is particularly prone to development and innovation. It is inevitable then, that some practitioners will fall behind at times and race ahead at others. Any snapshot of the field or an organisation at a particular point in time will have a bit of 'blur' – some transition – in its capturing of the current work.

Many practitioners, it would appear, have yet to abandon communicative principles of language learning and fully embrace integrative ones (Debski and Gruba 1999). Key features of Integrative CALL appear to lie beyond the realm of institutions constrained by a lack of resources, embedded teaching practices and large class sizes. In Transitional CALL, for example, individual learners have access to networked computers but may be encouraged to use them alone. On the whole, instructors negotiate focal topics and allow students to use online materials as they wish; these instructors, however, are not free to change the syllabus with learners as the subject is constrained by a need to teach a set of clearly defined tasks in relation to established curriculum guidelines. Group publishing space may not be readily available; generally, there is not enough time or resources in the institution to

teach students how to access discussion lists, publish on the Web or create multimedia.

In our view, work by Meagher and Castanos (1996), Kern (1996) and Felix (1999) are each examples of Transitional CALL. Hoven's (1999) work, in particular, captures the key aspects of this category:

- Sociocultural approaches to curriculum design are utilised;
- Consideration of learner-centredness recognises features that are less amenable to change, raising of awareness of features somewhat amenable to change, and accommodating features more amenable to change;
- Allocation of control to learner needs to be accompanied by awareness-raising in how to manage this control;
- Task-based pedagogy provides a basis for instructional design;
- Both mainstream second language pedagogy and CALL provide examples of models of good practice.

The key distinction between Transitional and Integrative CALL is learner choice and self-management of activity. In Transitional CALL settings, tasks are focused and clearly related to a set of defined curricular guidelines. Although the syllabus can be negotiated to some extent (Kumaravadivelu 1993: 81), classrooms in Transitional CALL emphasise the development of learner fluency above learner agency. Students, therefore, work to achieve individual goals.

By contrast, an Integrative CALL setting adopts Barson's (1999) view of a syllabus as a 'dynamic blueprint' where language content learning occurs through 'accidents' generated by projects. Tasks are neither defined nor well-defined, but remain contingent on what the learners would like to accomplish in regards to a set of desired goals. Thus, learner agency is paramount: in these settings, the learner is proactive participant in decisions regarding learning outcomes, materials design and group interactions. The group works as a team to reach constantly evolving goals.

In both settings, however, it should be noted that task authenticity is paramount. According to Little, Devitt and Singleton (1994), 'authenticity' requires that tasks fulfil three key parameters: (a) relate to real-world activities, (b) may not have a pre-determined outcome, (c) vary in levels of complexity. 'Authenticity' is one of the key concepts in the communicative approach which sees language learning primarily for the purposes of communication and not as an object in and of itself. Authentic texts, therefore, are those which 'fulfil some social purpose in the language community for which it was produced' (Little et al 1994: 45). According to Little et al (1994: 45), there are three reasons to such materials:

- 1 learners are likely to find them more motivating than invented texts;
- 2 the focus remains on content as opposed to form, and thus learners are more likely to engage with 'acquisition promoting content' and have a 'richer linguistic diet';
- 3 they provide a 'language bath' that helps to replicate L2 classroom experiences.

Based on her experiences of web-based teaching, Felix (1999) argues that only the Web provides a truly authentic world where activities no longer need to be simulated or artificially contextualised. She notes the shift from teacher-centred approaches, largely based on explicit grammar teaching, to learner-centred approaches largely represented in authentic task-based activities. This, Felix (1999: 86) writes, 'exploits the new medium's unique potential for authentic learning experiences'.

Healey (1999) offers a discussion on a wide range of language learning software currently available in a variety of skills in relation to their authenticity. She reinforces the importance of creating authentic language tasks while employing technology in the classroom. Healey (1999: 136) suggests that teachers need to create 'authentic tasks that vary in level and learning style and that demand attention to form as well as to content'.

Hanson-Smith (1999) argues that many researchers have indicated that a curriculum based around tasks rather than just drills and exercises can provide significant motivating practice. She identifies a range of software that supports authentic tasks for the language learner in a variety of levels and in different content areas. Hanson-Smith further adds that complex tasks can easily be broken down into small manageable tasks while still providing much motivation and interest for the learner. Hanson-Smith argues that virtual reality can be as 'gripping' as real-life situations with the added bonus that tasks can be placed on 'pause' for students to revisit and, unlike real-life interlocutors, can tolerate extensive repetition of language structures and vocabulary (Hanson-Smith 1999: 158).

In a note of caution, Kramsch and Anderson (1999) argue that the use of online technologies to teach language in its authentic cultural context challenges language learners and teachers in two ways. Although access to authentic cultural materials can evoke a sense of the sociocultural context in which the language is used, computer-based authentic materials require interpretation. Learners therefore need to observe and choose culturally relevant features of the context as well as put linguistic features in relation to other features to understand the use of language.

The emphasis on networked environments has changed the role of teachers. According to Corbel (1999), a teacher who locates a web page and writes an activity which becomes a task added to a database for learners is doing no more work than they would normally do but have added greatly to the available learning resources. Corbel (1999: 43) suggests that the VILC served as an example of a distributed system in that it is 'flat, web-based and reasonably non-authoritarian'. He further adds that teachers can work effectively in an online environment and continue to mediate between the learner and the resources available outside. The role of teacher is now that of 'reintermediary' (Tapcott 1999) who '... packages digital content in very personalised and customised ways' (Corbel 1999: 44).

Although Blin (1999) found that few CALL studies have researched autonomous learner processes, one direction in the move toward Integrative CALL is to allow for, and promote, learner autonomy throughout a course of instruction. Hoven (1999: 150) believes that a student can only learn effectively when they are in control of the 'content, mode, order, pace,

level and level of self-direction of the package' (1999: 150). Similarly, Felix (1999: 94) argues that 'the Web is best suited for task-driven activities in which students, working individually or in groups, have some degree of control over their learning'. Certainly Barson and Debski (1996) make a strong case for self-directed student work. Overall, CALL practitioners feel that pedagogical applications need to be designed in such a way that learners understand their own learning process. Hoven (1999) suggests that online help facilities, for example, include assistance with learning styles, strategies and background information. Effective navigation elements too, she adds, could help foster learner control.

## Online task research and evaluation

As Motteram has noted (1999), CALL research has generally lacked a strong evaluation component but rather appears to have focused on finding ways to justify large investment in computers. Burston (1996: 28) has argued that there is no reliable evidence to support the 'myth' in CALL that computer assistance in and of itself 'demonstrably produces positive language learning outcomes'.

Several factors, however, are merging to strengthen CALL evaluation research. Broadly speaking, the increased emphasis on computer-based learning throughout education has produced new tools for analysis, increased funding and widened interest. A general move towards qualitative approaches in applied linguistics (see, for example, Lazaraton 1995) and debate on the direction of CALL research has forced a re-consideration of previous approaches. Chapelle (1997) sparked debate when she argued that instructed second language acquisition (SLA) theory was the most appropriate way forward. SLA perspectives, according to Chapelle, provided a way for researchers to focus their attention and develop a coherent research agenda. To this suggestion, however, Salaberry (1999) replied that SLA theories were too constrained to be widely utilised within CALL. Salaberry argued that investigations could use computer-mediated communication perspectives to be more productive.

One trend in CALL research is to utilise qualitative approaches as a means to study computer practices within complex sociocultural settings (Debski and Levy 1999; Motteram 1999). In this view, the researchers are charged with developing a greater understanding of the educational institution itself and gaining a perspective on how computers are used within that institution before embarking on a long-term study. Qualitative methods include, for example, extended observations of the site as a participant-observer, semi-structured interviews with stake-holders, teacher diaries and debriefing sessions for project staff (Lynch 2000).

Within a qualitative approach to investigation, Chapelle (1999) suggests two ways to look into task-based pedagogies. The first method, she writes, involves having teachers themselves make judgements of task authenticity. The key criteria for authenticity, according to Chapelle, is to discern differences between classroom and real life tasks on five points of comparison: (a) goal, (b) process, (c) topic, (d) location and (e) duration. Chapelle suggests that researchers could begin to research tasks as either 'workplans' or 'processes'. As a 'workplan', a task describes what learners are expected to

do, how they do it, and the designated pedagogical goal. Viewed as a process, task is seen in terms of how learners go about completing a task, or otherwise engage in the 'processes' needed to fulfil or achieve a specified outcome.

## **Rationale for the present investigation**

To date, much CALL research has been conducted at well-resourced tertiary institutions (Warschauer 2000b). Investigators have yet to direct their attention to settings such as those described by Corbel (1996) and Taylor and Corbel (1998), for example, in which large numbers of newly arrived adult migrants make regular use of networked computers. In such situations, institutional constraints may restrict computer access, facility development and uptake in innovations. By and large, practitioners in these settings teach in ways that are characteristic of Transitional CALL: though aware of new approaches, they work towards set goals in an established curriculum, emphasise learner fluency over agency, and highlight the individual student learning over collaborative efforts.

The role of tasks within online language learning has itself been little explored; within adult migrant settings, almost no research has been conducted. As a way to begin such an investigation, however, an understanding of tasks as either a *workplan* or *process* (Chapelle 1999) remains a viable starting point. Such a perspective should be complimented by a recognition of an increase in project-based learning activities (Debski 2000) in which tasks serve as *catalysts* for collaborative group work.

The context for the present research is VILC, managed by Online AMES, a business unit of AMES Victoria, a specialist provider of language learning and employment services. With over 600 tasks written by over 80 task writers, VILC is used by over 150 educational institutions throughout Australia, many of which are AMEP providers. VILC provides a large, diverse environment for study.

Levy (1999) argues that a case study approach can be used to investigate CALL in particular contexts. In this way, researchers take on 'participant-observer' roles to leverage their familiarity with a setting towards broader insights of the use of computers within it. Because this approach was used in a study of an earlier curriculum innovation at AMES Victoria (Bottomley, Dalton and Corbel 1994), it is also used in the present research.

## Chapter 3

# Investigating online tasks

Based on an understanding of task design and research in Chapter Two, it was proposed to examine the role of online tasks in three ways: as a *workplan*, as a *process* and as a *catalyst* for small group projects. At the end of the chapter, it was also suggested that such an investigation be conducted within a unified learning institution (AMES Victoria), and that a single online resource (VILC) be the focal point of the investigation.

This chapter fully develops that proposal in four sections. First, it presents VILC as the case study for the investigation, with a particular focus of its role within AMES Victoria. Together, these two educational entities represent a rich opportunity for the investigation of online TBLT in practice. The second, third and fourth part of the chapter each relate to the proposed three-part framework for task research. For each approach, details of the study including participants, data collection methods and results are provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings in relation to the task research framework.

## The development of VILC

In December 1996, AMES Victoria successfully tendered for funding to develop materials for English teaching online. The funding was made available through the State Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE) to develop online learning in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) providers throughout the state of Victoria, Australia. In addition to content development, OTFE was developing an online learning environment, the *TAFE Virtual Campus*, as well as supporting other developmental initiatives.

The project was developed and managed by the AMES Computer Literacy Centre (CLiC), a small unit that was established in 1996 to build on emerging opportunities in online learning. Although the focus of the unit was initially on professional development, staff saw online resource creation as an important growth area.

The online materials development project began at the beginning of 1997. Because the project itself was not well defined, the CLiC manager sought to recruit teachers who would be able to work effectively in a relatively unstructured program. No previous experience in CALL was expected. Seven teachers were selected to work on the project one day a week for the year. To begin, they were to develop online resources out of existing materials used by the national Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) distance learning program. Eventually, they were to produce a collection of materials that could be delivered through a site such as the *TAFE Virtual Campus*.

The CLiC manager faced two early challenges in the online materials development project. As well as becoming familiar with the Internet, project staff

had to gain a strong understanding of the existing AMEP distance learning materials. Within the first few weeks however, it became apparent the target materials would be difficult to convert. The materials were designed in a way that made extensive use of audio and video files. The non-specialist teachers on the project found the resources too complex and could not revise them. In addition, they argued that many potential users of the resources had only limited Internet access (Taylor and Corbel 1998) and thus would not be able to download the distance education materials. Because of both the difficulty in revision and the large file size of the existing materials, a decision was made to produce simpler 'text-only' materials. These, it was thought, would not only be easier for the teachers to develop but easier for students to access.

Since one of goals of the project was to develop realistic and sustainable materials development processes for teachers throughout AMES Victoria, project staff reconsidered their initial use of existing distance learning materials. Staff decided to focus their efforts on the essentials of what teachers do already and how that could work online. Based on the familiar communicative language teaching paradigm, staff argued that teachers would likely want to work with authentic realia to create activities in order to meet specified learning objectives. At that point, project staff realised that much of the Internet consisted of authentic texts and messages.

To take advantage of the vast authentic resources, the teachers decided to create a way to situate this vast collection of realia under the Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE) framework. Accordingly, using the CSWE framework as a guideline, the project staff decided that they would not create content; rather, they would create learning tasks based on existing content.

While tasks were being written, the manager of CLiC realised that the *TAFE Virtual Campus* would not be ready in time to serve as the delivery platform. Thus, a development brief for a project-specific platform was sent out for tender. The successful design included a web-fronted database, an unusual strategy at that time. By the end of 1997, the database was completed and project staff had written over one hundred tasks. The initial seven-member team had expanded to involve other interested teachers. At that time, the working name of the site was the *Virtual CSWE*.

At the beginning of 1998, CLiC staff sought internal AMES funding to further develop the online resource centre. The site was renamed the *Virtual Independent Learning Centre (VILC)* to broaden its appeal. The new name, it was argued, would make reference to the many Independent Learning Centres that existed in various forms at a number of other educational institutions. One typical feature of independent learning centres is racks of plastic folders, each one containing a piece of realia and activities created by teachers. These are all organised according to curriculum levels. Each VILC task, therefore, was seen to be the virtual equivalent of one of these.

In the latter part of 1998, the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIMA) expressed interest in having AMEP providers make full use of VILC. Because of this, a subscription-based fee structure was put into place.

At the beginning of 1999, DIMA agreed to meet the subscription fee for all AMEP providers in Australia. The sponsorship led to the immediate establishment of a large community of users and increased the number of task writers. Throughout the year, a number of curriculums expanded, including the industry collection of tasks managed by the AMES Victoria Workplace Communications Unit.

In 2000, a new content stream, named Easynews, that was based on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) radio news, was introduced to VILC. Other content funded from several other sources was also made available. Because of this, VILC could now be subdivided into three main services:

- **Realweb:** a collection of hundreds of teacher-made learning tasks based on authentic websites and designed for the main ELT (English Language Teaching) curriculums;
- **Easynews:** a collection of specially prepared learning tasks based on SBS radio news; and
- **Checkout:** a collection of specially prepared reading comprehension materials.

The current design of VILC is based on providing these three options for learners.

### Case study: The use of *Realweb* on VILC

Of the three VILC content streams, *Realweb* was chosen as the basis for research into online task-based teaching. *Realweb*, it can be argued, is the one section of the site that has been developed specifically within a task-based framework. In addition, VILC developers were charged with the explicit goal of fostering teachers' understanding of skills in online task-based CALL.

The *Realweb* section of VILC is subdivided into three sections: categories, topics and competencies. Each of these sections provides a way to enter the central task database. Further, tasks on VILC have a three-part structure: (a) curriculum goal, (b) activity description and (c) suggested steps for completion. At the bottom of each task, a hypertext link is provided for students to access the authentic website. Once there, they can obtain information related to the task.

The task 'Lost Oboe' provides an example of a typical activity. The curriculum goal of this task is CSWE 2 in reading. The activity description reads:

*While on holiday in America, you find an oboe. It is a 'Loree' brand, with a small crack in it. You take it back to your hotel. Someone at the hotel tells you to look on the Internet – there is a page for lost instruments. Maybe you can find the owner ...*

The suggested steps to complete the 'Lost Oboe' task are:

- 1 Click on the 'Start the Task' button. This will take you to the 'Stolen Instruments Database' on the World Wide Web.
- 2 Search through the Database.  
*What is the name of the person who lost the oboe?*  
*What is their email address?*

- 3 Click on the 'Back' until you get back to this page. Then click on the 'Help' button to check your answers.

To complete the 'Lost Oboe' task, students are directed to answer only two questions. Other *Realweb* tasks, however, require students to complete 12 questions. In the more complex tasks, students need to print out the activity description to stay on track throughout the entire exercise.

We proceeded to investigate *Realweb* using the three approaches summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of the research approach**

Role of task	Participants	Data collection method	Key points of inquiry
Workplan	Task designers	Online discussion group	Task definition; authenticity; purpose
Process	Learners using the tasks	Observation of students	Actual usage; functions and moves; outcomes
Project activity	Computer specialist teachers	Semi-structured, face-to-face focus group	Online collaborative learning; project management; language production; project realisation

The remainder of the chapter describes our investigation of each of these three perspectives.

### Task developers: Task as workplan

As Chappelle (1999) recommends, one way to research task usage is through the metaphor of 'workplan'. In this view, the focal point of task development is to provide students with guidance as they work with authentic discourse.

Through an online discussion group for VILC task developers, the researchers posted two questions in order to stimulate discussion about the role of task as a workplan. These two questions were: (1) 'What do you understand by "task" in language teaching?' and (2) 'How does that link to *Realweb* tasks?' Responses posted over a two-week period from 12 task developers were collated and analysed by the researchers.

Three major themes – task authenticity, defining learner goals and improvement of task design – emerged from an analysis. As Johnson (2000) found in his work with task writers, the need for tasks to be authentic and meaningful was the most dominant theme. Contributors thought that learning from 'doctored' texts alone did not provide students with the necessary skills to deal with real situations. Because of this, they argued Web resources were much more 'authentic' and useful for the learners than other types of texts.

Interestingly, in the same line of discussion, the developers thought that tasks themselves did not necessarily need to be language-based. That is, the tasks could promote information searching skills, for example, or act as

a way to improve overall computer literacy. They suggested that tasks could promote the conduct of authentic transactions as in the case of sending an email message to a native speaker. In this way, VILC tasks could act as a bridge to real-world activities.

One participant mentioned that any striving towards authenticity necessarily involved some inconsistencies, misleading information and spontaneity that can be found in the everyday world. She argued that any student work with such challenges was a positive: indeed, one priority of VILC should be to help students learn how to deal effectively with frustrating aspects of authentic environments. Again, the point that VILC worked as a bridge to the real world was highlighted.

A second theme to emerge from the online discussions related to learner goals and outcomes. According to the developers, any task-based activity should have a clear purpose and achievement of that goal should be paramount. In this view, language learning in and of itself was seen as a secondary concern that 'occurs along the way'. They stressed that the central aim of the VILC tasks was to develop a range of electronic literacy skills, *not* explicit language learning.

The role of VILC in the promotion of electronic literacy skills continued to be a point of debate amongst task developers. As some developers argued, it was clear that the majority of the task outcomes were pre-determined and could be completed by finding specific bits of information from an authentic website. Because of this, they noted, the very structure of VILC tasks was itself an impediment to electronic literacy skill development. Such task design frustrated students who simply wanted to explore the Web because it precluded a desire for looking at, and for, materials in an independent manner.

As a counterpoint, other developers argued that the explicit goal of VILC was to promote language learning. If electronic literacy skills were highlighted, the primary purpose of the site would be undermined. One aspect of task design for these developers was to constrain the students and keep them 'on task' throughout an online session. All too often, this group of developers noted, it was easy for students to get distracted and 'surf' across a series of unrelated websites.

In the course of the online discussion, another issue to emerge was a need for VILC tasks to be used to explore collaborative learning through the Web. Some developers argued that the site was little more than a vehicle for the delivery of printed texts. It was odd, they thought, that students were spending valuable time at globally networked computers and directed to work at language learning activities by themselves. That is, the developers thought that students were not being enabled to take advantage of the potential to interact with others across the network, either locally or globally.

A third theme to emerge from the online discussion concerned ways to improve VILC. One critic thought the site was too teacher focused and did not allow students the freedom for students to simply use the Web to accomplish their own aims. Others pointed out the need for students to remain 'on task' throughout their time on the computer because they were

generally inexperienced in use of the Internet and could easily become lost. To improve, VILC could be designed to cater to a range of learner skills from beginning to experienced. Additionally, task writers suggested, navigation throughout the site could be made more transparent.

In summary, the online discussions amongst the task developers centred on assuring task authenticity, defining learner goals and improving task design. In regards to designing tasks as a 'workplan', they suggested a looser interpretation that would view task as a catalyst for group activities.

## **Learners: Task as process**

Continuing with our use of Chapelle's (1999) framework, we investigated the view of online tasks as a 'process'. To do this, we observed actual student use of VILC tasks in two different centres. The first series of observations took place at AMES One where students independently accessed VILC in the library. A self-access resource instructor was available throughout these sessions to provide support. The second series of observations took place at AMES Two in a couple of teacher-directed computer classes. Although all of the groups we observed were doing CSWE level 3 tasks, the learners' computer skills varied from rudimentary to competent. In total, then, we investigated three different learning situations: (1) individual and independent use of VILC tasks, (2) collaborative, supported access and (3) teacher-led, full-class instruction based on the VILC site.

At AMES One, individual learners working on reading tasks tended to work independently of other students. Although working in an independent learning environment, nonetheless they often relied on an onsite tutor for technical and linguistic assistance. Calling for assistance, it was observed, was based on the learner's perceived level of difficulty of the VILC tasks and the expectation of help for nearly every technical or language problem. Little interaction took place with the computer itself other than occasional scrolls through the text. Students then wrote answers by hand on printed task worksheets. Throughout, each of the learners stayed on task, used paper-based dictionaries when required and were focused on the task at hand.

By and large, learners who worked collaboratively did so to help each other with the navigational elements of the task. We discovered that the learners we observed on this occasion were first-time users of VILC and they struggled with simple navigation of the Internet. Questions they exchanged, for example, included 'How do I go back?' and 'What do I do now?'. Despite the extent of interactions, the pair produced very little actual language in regards to the task, although this could have been because the target competency for the task related to reading. Indeed, learners tended to work alone once they were within the task and their navigational problems were temporarily solved. The learners worked alone the majority of time. As with the individual learners, these students also relied heavily on their teacher for technical and vocabulary assistance. They also spent much of the available time scrolling through the reading text and only made occasional clicks to connected sites. Again, they too hand-wrote very short answers on to a printed worksheet. These learners stayed on task and reported that they had learnt computer skills as well as language skills. One key frustration, they said, was not having dictionary support to help them in the task.

At AMES Two, we observed two separate classes in which the teacher introduced VILC. In the first class, the instructor provided clear entry into VILC. Once in the site, however, he chose to allow the students to work independently on the task he had chosen. On the day of our observation, the task consisted of finding out information about the sinking of the *Titanic*. Students had to find, for example, the exact time the great ship sank and the number of passengers who survived. The learners were directed to work on their own. Throughout the session, a series of problems were observed. Most significantly difficulties with navigation, vocabulary, the complexity of language and the lack of a clear task purpose plagued the student efforts. The teacher did not encourage pair work in preference to independent learning.

In the second class, another teacher provided a much more detailed and structured introduction to VILC. In the session we observed, the instructor provided printed task work sheets for all students. Before starting the computers, she used the work sheets to pre-teach key vocabulary, and present an overview of the sinking of the *Titanic*. Once the computers were online, she assisted the students by carefully working through all stages of the tasks and highlighting potential navigational problems. Despite her clear approach, we observed that students still sought assistance from each other to help get through navigational problems and with vocabulary in particular. Here again, students tended to work individually as they worked on the tasks. As we listened, we noticed that the students produced little spoken language except to ask and answer questions relating to vocabulary. Students by and large focused on the reading text for long periods of time and occasionally scrolled through the text to find their answers. They also hand-wrote short answers on to printed worksheets.

At both sites, the students responded favourably to VILC. Learners found VILC tasks to be challenging, visually engaging and motivating. The topics were seen to be broad and interesting. One learner, Maria (we assigned pseudonyms to each student), felt learning English with authentic texts from the Internet and with unlimited access to data was beneficial. Another learner, Mei, suggested that using the computer itself to learn was desirable and the self-directed nature of the tasks was more useful than 'passive learning in the classroom'. Another learner who likes computers, Lily, felt that it is an effective way to learn as it keeps her focused. Georgia, a proficient computer user, felt that VILC is not only enjoyable but 'you can learn a lot of content knowledge as well as language and computer skills'. Learners liked the capacity to print out the task and the ease of reentering tasks the next day. Overall, the learners' interest increased as they went further into the task.

However, we also observed many problems the learners encountered while doing VILC tasks. We characterised these observations as *initial*, *within-task*, and *post-task* frustrations and summarised them in Table 4.

**Table 4: Summary of learner frustrations while using Realweb tasks**

Type of frustration	Key characteristics
Initial	Navigational problems; level of difficulty; lack of specific purpose; choosing an appropriate task; unclear pedagogical task goals or activities
Within-task	Navigation: lost within authentic sites and unable to return to VILC; lack of key vocabulary support; difficult or inappropriate authentic materials; poorly-written tasks
Post-task	Difficult to navigate to <i>Help</i> sections; lack of standard evaluation; no opportunity to debrief or extend to further activities and/or related materials; inability to use chat site
Technical or linguistic	Task objective not written at level appropriate language; screen and/or font size too small; difficulties with the printer; authentic sites too complex; not able to do 'independently'; teaching assistants not able to help at times

Clearly, the most common *initial* frustration related to navigational issues. Task instructions were either too wordy or too complex for the students' perceived level of competence. There was much confusion over the number of instructional choices in the initial steps of the task. The initial lists of competencies, for example, are not numbered. Because of this, many students had difficulty locating the correct competency. Students reported that they had to complete too many steps to enter the site; they suggested that some shortcuts would have been preferable. Many students would have benefited from an introductory session on how to navigate through the VILC site. A 'site map' would be useful to this group of learner. Other students, however, required more basic training. Amongst those we observed, for example, some had no knowledge of how to print, how to use navigational icons or how to access the information needed to complete a task.

Navigational confusion and a lack of support also contributed to *within-task* frustrations. Some students were unable to find the links between the stages of within an individual task because of the lack of clear signposting in a task description. We observed learners who, for example, were unable to recover from a mistaken click on an inappropriate level of competency. Because of this single initial error, much of the rest of the session was spent trying to work through material that was beyond their proficiency level. Attendant difficulties with navigation then further compounded the frustration of working ineffectively with the authentic resources.

Dealing with unknown key vocabulary was also a *within-task* challenge for students. Many learners complained that there was no vocabulary support built into the task. Furthermore, parts of the task did not require computer usage at all. Indeed, one student had printed out the reading text and the questions and was doing the task completely as a paper-based activity. Usage of the computer here was removed from the language learning environment.

Post-task frustrations for learners occurred when they sought to correct their work. In general, they complained about having an unclear sense of what the outcome of a particular task should be. This frustration was

compounded when students found it difficult to find answers to the tasks located within the *Help* section. Does *Help* equal *Answers*? In order to find the correct answers, students had to go back to the initial screen and scroll down to the bottom of the page to access this important information. Students found this process cumbersome and confusing.

A range of general frustrations also emerged for the learners in relation to linguistic and technical issues. Some of the authentic sites, for example, contained language that was too complex, dense or tedious. In one observation, it was noted that two students took approximately 45 minutes to read and then move beyond two initial paragraphs of a set task. One of these students was further frustrated when he found that his inaction had caused the system to 'time out'; he had to ask for teacher assistance to log back in and navigate back to the task.

Other frustrations were apparent. In terms of language output, it was apparent that the students wrote very little as they undertook the tasks. As noted, most students spent time learning to navigate as opposed to productively engaging with tasks. In relation to exercise, some learners remarked that there was not an overall clear objective as to why they were doing the task. We asked Felix, for example 'What did you learn in this task?', and he responded that he had 'No idea'. Regarding technical issues, students complained that the computer screen and text font were too small. A few students remarked that they had difficulty reading the screen and did not know how to rectify the situation. Some students printed out several pages of websites to read and study at a later date.

Of course, not all learners had difficulties using the VILC site, or the Internet in general. These highly competent learners complained that the tasks were not sufficiently challenging. One learner suggested that the tasks should allow more 'surfing' to encourage independent research and involve the use of email.

When the three teachers were asked specifically about VILC, they responded with enthusiasm. They said that they considered the site a motivating and challenging addition to their classrooms. Each remarked, however, that the entry in and use of VILC was overly complex. Many students needed help to navigate through the site. To help students during these initial stages, the teachers had prepared an introduction to VILC on laminated worksheets clearly outlining the different steps to successfully enter VILC. The computer teachers also had prepared typed worksheets outlining the steps and stages of VILC but chose to teach entry by example on the overhead computer screen. Two teachers commented that they felt that VILC was better suited to higher level learners due to the complexity involved in the instructions and the language. Two of the teachers had never thought of using pairs or groups within VILC and suggested that they tended to teach along traditional CALL lines. They believed that learners also needed to learn to work independently. By contrast, the library teacher was quick to group students together to navigate entry into VILC.

Criticisms of VILC focused on frustrations caused by the perceived complexity of navigation, the difficulty in working through activities and the inappropriate level of some of the questions. Other concerns included

overall site maintenance, specifically 'broken links', and the lack of a single point of contact to address concerns relating to the repair of glitches in the system.

## **Computer instructors: Task as group project**

As noted, the use of the Internet as a collaborative workspace is relatively rare in adult migrant ESL settings. Though well-known in both general education contexts at a variety of levels (eg Dodge 2000; Land and Green 2000) and, increasingly, within tertiary settings (eg Debski 2000), networked environments have not been widely utilised in the AMES.

Because web-based collaborative learning is not practised in AMES Victoria, it was decided this topic was best investigated through an open-ended discussion with the computer specialists. As specialists, it was likely this group would be informed about current approaches to CALL instruction and open to discussion about future possibilities. During the afternoon of a regular one-day meeting, the researchers presented the central Webquest site ([edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest](http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest)) to sixteen of these specialists. The intention of the session was twofold. Our first aim was to introduce key features of the Webquest site and explain how a Webquest activity might function with AMEP students. A second intent was to get feedback from the computer specialists about how such activities could potentially be made relevant to learners. Prior to the session, the specialists were told their comments would be recorded and they were encouraged to make comments freely. In addition to handwritten notes, an audio recording of the session was made. The researchers then used both their notes and the audiotape to summarise the main issues.

Response to the Webquest site was positive. The teachers were impressed by the clear structure of Webquest framework. The range of listed activities, too, were considered to correspond well with the variety of competencies and certificate levels required by learners. They noted, however, that such activities would likely be most relevant to advanced learners who needed to develop their oral presentation and report writing skills. Consequently, the specialists suggested that Webquest-type activities would be best suited to students who intended to pursue tertiary study.

Not surprisingly, the computer specialists thought that the Webquest framework could be used to promote small group work. Both the cultural and psychological supports that such a learning environment provides, they suggested, were clearly beneficial and sensitive to preferred learning styles. Nonetheless, a major concern of the specialists was that *any* extended, long-term small group work, whether computer-based or not, was impractical for AMES students. Because the students were often busy with matters outside the classroom, they argued, attendance could possibly be irregular and not conducive to extended group processes.

Concerns were also voiced that Webquest-type activities in the classroom would put further pressure on already limited time restrictions that had been set for students to complete each competency. The specialists argued that students inevitably preferred to pursue the simplest and most direct route to finish a goal. Because of this, such activities might eventually be

seen as extraneous to both individual student and overall AMES program goals. Furthermore, some specialists felt that Webquest activities were likely to be too difficult for those learners who were already having problems with existing VILC tasks.

In summary, the computer specialists saw merit in setting small-group activities, but were clearly unsure whether or not a Webquest-type framework was appropriate for the development of online materials in the AMES context.

## Discussion

AMES Victoria presents a clear picture of an institution moving through an era of Transitional CALL. Evidence of contradictions, the hallmark of transition, abound. Task developers for example, on the one hand, indicated that online activities could usefully incorporate more opportunities for collaborative learning yet, on the other hand, computer specialist teachers were unsure of adopting a framework that could lead them further down the path of Integrative CALL. Students were excited by having full online access; nonetheless, they tended to focus on completing tasks rather than exploring the networked environment more widely. This indeed is precisely what *Realweb* is intended to force them to do, given the nature of the curriculum framework, which focuses on specific outcomes in a restricted time frame.

Regarding *task as a workplan*, online discussion amongst *Realweb* task writers indicated some dissatisfaction with the current development procedures. A tension was evident between the use of a *Realweb* task to practise a language goal, and the use of VILC as an introduction to the Internet and online learning.

In the observation of task as process, a tension was apparent between the expectation by some teachers that VILC would teach online skills, and the need recognised by others to help the students learn the skills. This reflected a broader issue of the teachers' understanding of their roles in relation to online task-based learning. However, it must be remembered that the observation was based on the first experience the learners had had with VILC.

In considering the possibility of moving beyond current practice, it is apparent that such a project-based conceptualisation of TBLT would require substantial changes be made within AMEP programs. First and foremost, widespread consultation with instructors would need to take place. At the chalkface and the screen, the teachers would need to be convinced that such an approach would work within the CSWE-based curriculum. How, for example, would the completion of projects fit within the competency framework and truly contribute to the overall development of proficiency? The computer specialists claimed that students would also need convincing; without a clear path through the framework (eg moving from CSWE 2 to CSWE 3), they would likely question such an approach. Further, the specialist argued, aspects of student attendance would itself curtail the use of long-term small group work as a necessary component of instruction.

Computer specialist instructors indicated a willingness to move in such a

direction but nonetheless, they expressed a number of reservations about doing so.

Before considering the implications of the findings, it is important to remind ourselves of the limitations of the data, particularly in the examination of tasks in progress. As mentioned earlier, this was the learners' first encounter with VILC. Nevertheless, there are clear implications for task creation and use, and we turn to these in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4

# Online task design and research

Due to the greater use of computer-based tests, shifts in student work styles and the growing use of information technologies, Chapelle (2001: 2) predicts ‘anyone concerned with second language teaching and learning in the 21st century needs to grasp the nature of the unique technology-mediated tasks learners can engage in for language acquisition and how such tasks can be used for assessment’. If such a statement is interpreted broadly, Chapelle’s comment points to a time in the near future when online task-based teaching and assessment will become much more central to language learning.

In this chapter, we first suggest key principles of task design based on the results of our investigation. Following that, we consider what to do with addressing learner needs. Finally, we point out areas of further research that, we think, would enhance and promote effective online task-based learning.

### Suggestions for task definition and design

Given the growing integration of computers into language teaching, it is disappointing to see recent definitions of pedagogic tasks (Bygate, Skehan and Swain 2001) ignore the role of technology in task-based teaching. Because of this, their application may be limited to research on task-based teaching within traditional classrooms. To expand, we depart from earlier definitions and attempt to define a technologically mediated task as it might be understood in a Transitional or Integrative CALL setting:

*A loosely-directed piece of work which requires each member of a learning team to communicate using language, with an emphasis on authenticity, to achieve an outcome as part of an overall purposeful activity that is based on a identified set of criteria.*

Here, we remove ‘focused, well-defined’ from the Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001) definition in order to acknowledge pedagogies based on social constructivist theories of instruction (see Driscoll 2000). In these approaches to teaching, learners themselves contest and define what they need to do. Instructors help facilitate loosely directed projects. Thus, learning that takes place in the educational setting can transfer more easily to real situations in which there are many ‘ill-defined’ areas of language use.

Second, we point out that tasks need to require interaction in a small team. Although part of some definitions of tasks (most prominently in Breen 1987), we bring it to the fore to acknowledge a growing trend in CALL curricula to promote language development within social settings (Belz 2002). Tasks are

defined, and shaped, by the team interactions as they work towards an overall activity.

Further, because of our discussions with task developers and language teachers, we saw a need to highlight authentic usage as a key component of task definition. When applied to online learning, it can be argued that the vast amount of realia available on the Internet can be used as a basis for task design and purposeful interaction with native speakers.

A fourth part of our definition of tasks speaks to the need for outcomes relating to an identified set of criteria. As demonstrated through the need of VILC tasks to be tied to the CSWE curriculum, it is paramount that task writers stay on track when writing online material. Additionally, of course, the strength of this link helps the learners to feel confident that they are achieving what they set out to do.

Moving now towards task design, key outcomes of our study relate to task structure and navigation, the need to use appropriate language and to link tasks and activities to recognised curricular guidelines. We suggest that effective task creation needs to be appropriately framed for non-specialist task writers – or, in other words, classroom teachers. Task creation, we suggest, can be assisted with the aid of a predesigned structure and layout that integrates graphic design, icons, a key image and navigational elements. These points could all be put into a web-ready template for task designers to fill out (for example, see <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/LessonTemplate.html>).

Once an overall design that promotes ease of navigation is in place, we suggest that online tasks need six components: (1) introduction, (2) statement of objective, (3) process, (4) resources, (5) evaluation and (6) conclusion. Extensions to tasks, in the form of Teacher’s Notes, could also be made.

**Table 5: Key components of task design**

Task component	Definition
Introduction	Prepare and motivate learner interest in the area
Statement of objective	Describe clearly and simply what you expect the learner to achieve
Steps and processes	Explain the likely steps that the learner should go through
Resources	Provide a list of preselected web pages that learners can use to achieve the objective
Evaluation	Tell the students how to check their answers by providing a completed set of answers or model responses and relate this to a specific goal within an identified curriculum framework
Conclusion and extension	Encourage learners to think about what has been learned and how it can be applied in different contexts

In Appendix B, we provide an example of the use of this structure in a written task. In addition, teachers need more support in contextualising tasks within a broader pedagogic framework. They need guidance on activities before, during and after a task, and how the task is integrated

into a broader program of work. At the same time, the issue of skills needs to be addressed, both for the Internet and for specific applications such as the VILC.

## Addressing user needs

Many of the underlying issues raised in this study of online task-based teaching, particularly in regards to task design itself, are partially due to the rapid and unanticipated growth of the VILC project. In the face of this growth in the use of *Realweb*, however, it has become clear that initial hopes for widespread task development by teachers have been optimistic. Although many teachers have an improved understanding of the Internet and could access it from their workstations, both new and established task creators have not continued to develop tasks.

In addition, the rapid expansion of *Realweb* itself meant that some poorly prepared tasks appeared on the site. The loss of quality control frustrated teachers and learners alike. For their part, task developers also had difficulty locating online authentic materials that could meet curriculum requirements, particularly at the lower levels. The initial attraction of *Realweb* tasks design to be simple, mostly text-based and appropriate for use by students with limited online time – major reasons for their success – now appears to be dated. To refresh the VILC, a major internal survey of users was undertaken in 2001. Findings from that survey have led to a redesign and rebuild of the site.

In the light of the survey, site administrators undertook three changes to the VILC. First, the structure and navigation of the site was improved. Second, all new *Realweb* tasks are now based on a standard template. Third, a formally accredited training program for teachers using the VILC has been developed (Corbel 2001).

In the accredited training program (for excerpts, see Appendix C), material is presented under the headings *Using VILC*, *Teaching with VILC* and *Basic Task Design*. Throughout the first section, *Using VILC*, the site is introduced from the point of view of the student. This allows the teacher (and potential task developer) an opportunity to become familiar with the navigation and learning approach. The *Teaching with VILC* section offers suggestions for activities before, during and after the task. It clearly identifies the role of teachers and other support staff. *Basic Task Design* introduces task writing. It is based on a new template for *Realweb* tasks that integrates findings of this research report.

## Suggestions for further research

First, in relation to the case study itself, investigation is needed on a continual basis on how the redesign of the VILC for 2001 is operating. Specifically, a similar three-part approach to task usage that was used in the present study could be reapplied to the revised site. Echoing earlier calls from Nunan (1993), particular focus on how learners themselves go about using the tasks is needed. If tasks have been improved by our suggested guidelines and revised teacher training procedures, in which ways do learners now operate? Are learners pleased with the redesign?

On a related issue, we would argue that progress could be made in online TBLT by drawing from the field of instructional design with a particular eye on both 'adult learning' and 'task analysis procedures' (see, for example, Driscoll 2000; Jonassen, Hannum and Tessmer 1999), as well as focusing on task through a perspective born in SLA research (Chapelle 1997). For teachers, the academic nature of research in psycholinguistic theory may seem distant (Nunan 1993). Mainstream educators have widely examined virtual learning environments (see Jonassen and Land 2000); by and large, CALL specialists have been hesitant to draw on their experience and make it relevant to second language contexts. The theoretical basis offered by instructional systems design, educational psychology and constructivist pedagogies has much to offer to the field.

Second, because of the pedagogical effectiveness of project-based learning (Debski 2000; Land and Greene 2000; Warschauer and Kern 2000), a full review of literature in this area and an agenda for research need to be established in relation to Transitional CALL. It is apparent that AMEP providers need to be informed about online collaborative learning to make decisions in relation to their client groups. A needs analysis could be carried out, for example. In particular, the attitudes of adult migrant learners may require scrutiny in advance of any planned changes.

On a third note, research is needed in the area of online assessment in terms of self-assessment, cumulative (classroom-based) and summative assessment. At present, there seems to be little conversation between CALL specialists and test developers (Gruba 1999). The lack of research in this area can potentially undermine, or call into question, the efficacy of online task-based language teaching.

Finally, a broad research agenda to investigate the role of online learning throughout the organisations that deliver the AMEP as a whole is needed. Issues to do with student access, for example, need to be closely examined (Corbel 1998; Murray 1999). We need to expand our understanding of Transitional CALL – including study of the context in which it operates. It is conceivable that the online site may well be interpreted differently in an ESL context as opposed to an EFL one. Global perspectives need to be thought through in regard to cultural appropriacy and interests. Within a particular setting, Corbel (1996) argues that change management, work styles, institutional culture and management structures themselves all contribute to a particular view of educational computer usage that eventually influences student learning itself.

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# Appendixes

Appendix A: Glossary of acronyms used in this report

Appendix B: Example task

Appendix C: Excerpts from *Entry Point* (Corbel 2001)

# Appendix A

## Glossary of acronyms used in this report

<b>AMEP</b>	Adult Migrant English Program
<b>AMES</b>	Adult Migrant Education Service
<b>CALL</b>	computer-assisted language learning
<b>CLiC</b>	Computer Literacy Centre
<b>CSWE</b>	Certificates in Spoken and Written English
<b>DIMA</b>	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (pre November 2001)
<b>DIMIA</b>	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (post November 2001)
<b>EFL</b>	English as a Foreign Language
<b>ELT</b>	English Language Teaching
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>OTFE</b>	Office of Training and Further Education
<b>SBS</b>	Special Broadcasting Service
<b>SLA</b>	second language acquisition
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>TBLT</b>	task-based language teaching
<b>VILC</b>	Virtual Independent Learning Centre

# Appendix B

## Example task

### 1 Introduction

Write a short paragraph here to introduce the overall task to the students. It is important that the introduction is interesting, motivational and appropriate to the intended competency level. If the task includes a role or scenario, then here is where it will be outlined. If the activity is a more straightforward research task, then here is where you provide a short overview of the task: (a) what it is about and (b) what the students will do. Most importantly, the main focus of the introduction is to prepare and hook the reader's interest. You may like to include a key question or two around which the whole *Realweb* task is centred. This provides a clear focus for the learner. Here's an example:

*Melbourne Zoo is world famous for having a wide variety of Australian and international animals. The animals enjoy living in a near-natural habitat. You have a day to visit the zoo as part of a team of international specialists. Each team member must write a report on your special area related to zoo-keeping. Your part of the overall report will be submitted, via email, to the zoo management as they look for ways to make the Melbourne Zoo the best in the world.*

### 2 Statement of objective

The statement of objective makes sure that the learners know why they are doing a task and what they will learn. Describe clearly and simply what you expect the learners to achieve. Also, be sure to tie the objective to a larger curriculum framework – for example, state the level of competency. Examples of outcomes include:

- Write a letter using background information
- Read a text and identify its main ideas
- Prepare a research report for oral presentation
- Summarise several related texts into a single report
- Formulate an argument for a debate
- Write an email that states your position on a current topic, or think of a way to further process and transform information that learners have gathered.

In the statement of objective, consider what kind of thinking and communication skills are encouraged by this activity, ie inferencing, creative problem solving, observation and categorisation, comparison, sequencing and teamwork. Continuing with our example, consider:

*By doing this task, you will be able to write a report. You will also gain experience in the following areas: skimming and scanning, summarising main points, identifying important information and learning vocabulary in context.*

### 3 Steps and processes

To accomplish this task, explain the likely steps that the learners should go through. Clearly number the steps to show the students how the activity is structured. An example might be:

*First, you will be assigned to a team of international specialists who are doing a worldwide survey of the conditions of the world's zoos. In this activity, you will investigate the conditions for animals at the Royal Melbourne Zoo.*

*Second, choose a character from the following list:*

- *animal doctor*
- *living conditions and natural environment specialist*
- *feeding specialist*
- *mating habits and habitat specialist*
- *protection of endangered species specialist.*

*Once you've decided on your character, click on the appropriate character to begin to research your area. (Learners here will access the online resources that the task developer has identified as they go through the process. You may have a set of separated links specific to the character's area that everyone looks at for background information. You may like to include some guidance on how to organise the information gathered.)*

*After you've collected all the information from the different characters in your group, write a report on the conditions for animals at the Royal Melbourne Zoo.*

### 4 Resources

Direct the students to a preselected list of sites related to the activity. For example:

Links to Melbourne Zoo: <http://www.zoo.org.au/>

Zoo Month: [http://www.acn.net.au/articles/1998/09/zoo\\_month.htm](http://www.acn.net.au/articles/1998/09/zoo_month.htm)

### 5 Evaluation

In this section, provide a way to tell the students that they have finished the task and how to check their answers. Be sure that they are able to access the answers easily, and encourage them to reflect on their own successes. Do they feel confident that they have mastered the stated objective?

### 6 Conclusion

Finally, encourage the learners to think about what has been learned in a different context: that is, to communicate their findings in a discussion or transfer ideas to a related topic (eg from talking about cars to transport with aeroplanes). Put in a few rhetorical questions, for example, to extend their thinking beyond the immediate task. A conclusion, for example, could be like this:

*You have now learned about the Melbourne Zoo. Tell your friends about zoo highlights: Will Yakini's mother have another baby soon? How does this zoo compare with others that you have visited around the world? Get together with another student to work out a design for a T-shirt to advertise the rainforest section of the zoo.*

# Appendix C

## Excerpts from *Entry Point* (Corbel 2001)

### VILC Home

We'll start with the VILC Home page.

You should have Navigator or Internet Explorer open.

In the location/address box type: **www.virtualilc.com**

The VILC site displays.

Although it is located in Australia, VILC does not display an **au** extension. The country extension is optional, and many sites omit it for simplicity or where they are used outside their country of origin.

Move the cursor over the page. You will see that there are three groups of links.

These are not indicated as links until you roll over them, when the cursor changes to a pointing finger.

Click on **About VILC**.

A new screen appears with information about VILC.

The About VILC window shows several options for moving around.

Because the text is longer than one window, a scroll bar has appeared.

Jump down to the end of the text.

Click on the **Back to Top** link to go to the top of the text.

Click on the **Back** link at the top left of the window.

You are now back at the Home page.

Note that Back takes you back up the VILC structure towards Home. It is not necessarily the previous page you were on.

To go to previous pages visited, use the browser buttons.

Click on the **Back** button. You are now at About VILC again.

Click on the **Forward** button. You are now 'back' Home.

Try the other links on the page. Make sure you end up on the Home page.

You can get to the Home page anywhere within VILC by clicking on the **VILC** icon (top right of the screen).

### My VILC

We have looked around VILC as a visitor. Now let's look inside as a student.

You will log in as a user using your institution's username and password. If you don't have one, contact VILC administration.

Type your username (make sure you use the correct upper and lower case).

Type your password.

Click on **GO**.

When you log in you see My VILC. This page is your main reference point while using VILC.

At the top of the page you see the VILC logo bar. (Remember that clicking on the **VILC** logo will take you to Home.)

Below that you see a navigation bar with a list of links to help you use VILC.

Below the navigation bar, The News gives you information about new content and services.

Next to the My VILC heading you see the name of your institution and possibly the name of an organisation that is sponsoring your institution's access.

Under the My VILC heading you see headings for three content 'streams': *Realweb*, *Easynews* and *Checkout*. Each has a number of links beneath it. (Note that what you see under these headings depends on what your institution has subscribed to. It may differ from what is shown here, which is the full range of content available.)

Let's look at each content stream.

## Realweb

*Realweb* is a collection of hundreds of tasks on a range of topics for a range of popular language curriculums.

You should be at My VILC.

You should see a list of curriculums under the three stream headings. Each of these is called a strand. Each of the curriculum strands listed works in the same way. Let's look at the CSWE as an example.

Click on **CSWE**. You now see the main CSWE page.

There are four main activities available for the CSWE (and any curriculum) on its curriculum strand Home page:

- **Find a task** gives you four ways of accessing the hundreds of tasks for the CSWE.
- **Latest tasks** lists the most recently created tasks.
- **Discussion** leads to the discussion group for the CSWE.
- If you want to know more about the CSWE itself, you can click on **About CSWE**.

We'll look at these in more detail later. First we'll look at an actual task.

Let's look at one of the latest tasks.

Click on the task at the top of the list. The task will be displayed.

Let's have a closer look at the task page.

At the top, as usual, you see the logo bar and the navigation bar.

The **VILC** logo takes you to VILC Home.

<< **Back** takes you to the CSWE Home page.

**CSWE** also takes you to the CSWE Home page.

**My VILC** takes you to the My VILC page.

Let's have a closer look at the heading area.

The title of the task is unique to this task.

Below the title are four pieces of information about the task:

- the name of the topic which the task belongs to
- the name of the taskwriter
- the curriculum level which the task belongs to
- the curriculum element (a subset of the level) which the task belongs to.

A *Realweb* task is a set of activities focusing on a curriculum goal based on an authentic web page. The task itself has three key parts – the task, the steps and the target web page.

The Task section says what the task is about and what the student will do and why. It provides the relationship to the curriculum goal. It also checks if the student is ready to do the task.

You might see an additional link – **Listen to the task**. This provides a spoken version of the task. There will always be a link to **How to do a task**, which provides step-by-step instructions on tasks. Students should always have been taught these steps before doing their first task.

There will be a minimum of four steps and probably no more than six (ie three activities).

The purpose of Step 1 is always for the student to visit the target web page and have a positive encounter with it.

Step 2 (and following) is a detailed statement of exactly what to do and how to do it, for one defined part of the task only.

The second-last step will bring the task to a close by recapping the activities.

The final step looks beyond the task to other related learning options.

The **Go to web page** link connects the student to the target web page.

To do the activities, the student moves between the task page and the target web page by using the **Back** and **Forward** buttons on the browser.

While you're doing the task a **Help** button may be available.

An **Answers** button may be available. This is intended for use when you've finished.

There may be another three options available:

- **Go to web page 2** is a link to a related site that might be of interest.
- **Language practice** is a link to a language practice site.
- **Discussion** links to the discussion area for this curriculum strand.

Try these options, if available.

When you've finished, click on **CSWE** (in the navigation bar) to go to the main CSWE page.

## Finding a task

You should be at the CSWE Home page. If not go there now.

There are hundreds of tasks for the CSWE. How do you find the one you want? You can search top down or bottom up. Top down searches can be done by

topic, by curriculum level and element, or by taskwriter. Bottom up searches are based on text in the task. Let's see how any task is accessible from all four directions.

Let's assume you want to find a task for a particular CSWE competency.

Click on **Certificates and Competencies**.

Choose the certificate you want. The competencies for that certificate are listed.

Choose the competency you want. The tasks available for that competency are listed.

Choose the task you want. The task is displayed.

Make a note of the name of the topic and the name of the taskwriter.

Click on **CSWE** to go back to the main CSWE screen.

Let's find the same task using the other three search options.

Click on **Topics**. An alphabetic list of topics is displayed.

Click on the first letter of the topic that your task from the previous activity belongs to.

The list of topics beginning with that letter is displayed.

Click on the topic you want. The tasks for that topic are displayed.

Click on the task you want. The task is displayed.

Click on **CSWE** to go back to the main CSWE screen.

Repeat the previous steps with Taskwriters.

To do a bottom up search, type any word from the task in the **Search for** box and click on **GO**. A list of tasks containing that word is displayed.

## Discussion software

So far we have looked at delivery of content to learners. However, one of the most important uses of the Internet in language teaching is as a communications medium. Communications via the Internet is primarily via email, discussions and chat. Discussions are perhaps most commonly used among learning groups, since they allow individuals to share their thoughts and ideas with others.

Each *Realweb* and *Easynews* strand has a discussion area. The discussion allows users to comment on a task or topic or to discuss issues that may interest them. The discussion is moderated by the Strand Leader, a teacher who is a specialist in that curriculum and is responsible for quality control for it.

Let's look at the discussion area for the CSWE.

Go to the main strand page.

Click on **Discussion**. The discussion screen displays.

Messages are listed in reverse order. Some messages are replies to previous messages. These are indented to the right.

Click on the first message. The text displays, together with the option to reply.

Click on **Return to Discussion** to return to the discussion area.

Click on **Post New Message**. Fill in the information and click on **Submit**.

Click on **Return to Discussion** to return to the discussion area.

Use Search to find a message or messages that include the word you search by.

## Teaching with online tasks: Extract from *Entry Point* (Corbel 2001)

The word 'independent' in VILC may suggest that learners can be let loose to pursue their interests and can be assumed to make useful and informed decisions about what to do and how to do it. While that might possibly be the case on rare occasions, generally there will be a need for support at all stages of the task activities.

### Before the task

Teaching with VILC, like all teaching, requires preparation. *Realweb*, *Easynews* and *Checkout* are all quite straightforward, but you need to ensure that you are confident with them. For many students, and for some teachers, VILC will be one of their first encounters with the Internet. You need to ensure that they have a positive and useful experience.

Just as with using a real independent learning centre, the skills of users must be checked and may need to be taught. Before students do their first task, they need to go through the following steps. This information is always available to the student through a link in the Task section on *Realweb* tasks. It could be printed and put next to the computer as well.

### How to do a task

Read all the steps in the task first.

You may be able to print the task. Check with your teacher first.

To print the task, click [details here].

Read the instructions in Step 1 carefully.

When you know what to do, click on **Go to web page** (at the bottom of the task).

You will now see a new page on the screen.

To read the instructions again, click on the **Back** button (top left of your window).

To return to the page again, click on the **Forward** button (top left of your window).

When you have finished Step 1, go to Step 2.

Read the instructions.

When you know what to do, click on the **Forward** button.

Repeat for other steps.

For help when you are doing a task, click on **Help** (at the bottom of the task).

To find out how well you did, click on **Answers** (at the bottom of the task).

You may also do other activities.

Go to web page 2, which is another interesting page.

If you don't know what to do, click on **How to do a task** on the Task page.

If you don't have good Internet access for the whole class, you may wish to simply print the task(s) and the target page(s) and do them without the computer.

### During the task

VILC lends itself to individual, pair, group and whole-class work, with perhaps a mix of these in a lesson. For example, you could introduce a topic, practise related vocabulary, then divide students into groups, with each one looking at a different task under that topic.

VILC is primarily intended for the individual learner, and the tasks are intended to be self-contained. However, a staff member needs to be available to deal with technical and language issues that arise.

Don't let the VILC name put you off pair and groupwork. Just as many tasks may be usefully done in pairs or groups, so too with VILC tasks.

Whole-class work is also appropriate, for example, to:

- introduce a topic, by preteaching vocabulary
- teach VILC and Internet skills
- display a datashow when there is a limited number of computers available or access is slow.

### After the task

Many tasks are actually preparation for a subsequent assessment activity, which is done with the teacher. Assessment is not built into the task itself.

The following options *may* appear, depending on how the task has been set up by the taskwriter:

- **Go to web page 2** – links to a related page that might be of interest.
- **Language practice** – links to a related grammar or vocabulary practice page.
- **Discussion** – provides a direct link to the discussion area for this curriculum.

Although *Realweb* and *Easynews* focus on individual tasks you can plan a sequence of tasks based around a topic, as well as a series of topics. This is useful for project-based CALL or specialist courses in areas such as Business English. By searching *Realweb* and *Easynews* using the same or similar search term, you can produce an excellent mix of project materials.

## Writing online tasks: Extract from *Entry Point* (Corbel 2001)

In Using VILC we looked at the ways in which you can carry out the role of **user** with VILC. A user can be a teacher or student. In this module we will look at another VILC role, that of **taskwriter**. A taskwriter is any teacher who wishes to actually create content for a VILC content stream.

*Realweb* is a collection of hundreds of learning tasks, on dozens of topics, for a range of curriculums, and linked to real web pages. A *Realweb* task frames an authentic page for a curriculum purpose. Writing a task means identifying the goal, identifying the web page and creating activities that bring the two together.

### **Preparing a task**

At this stage you will identify the curriculum goals for the task, identify the requirements of the outcomes relating to that goal, and identify what learning activities are likely to be appropriate.

The first step is choosing the curriculum the task will relate to. Then you need to identify the subset of that curriculum the task will link to.

In VILC each curriculum is called a *strand*, which is organised by *levels* and *elements*. Elements are subsets of levels. You won't necessarily see these terms much within VILC since they are labelled differently within each curriculum strand.

Log in to VILC with your student username and password.

At My VILC click on **CSWE**. Click on **Curriculum levels and elements**.

In the CSWE, the levels are called *certificates* and the elements are called *competencies*.

Look at several other strands to see how the curriculum levels and elements of the levels are named.

Decide which curriculum level and element you will create a task for.

Some curriculums have specific requirements associated with each element. These may be displayed with the strand, but also may not be. You should go back to the original curriculum document and refamiliarise yourself with the requirements of the element you have chosen. If there are typical text types associated with the element, note their characteristics. You'll need to refer to these later on.

Get a copy of the outcome requirements for your task.

In creating learning activities you have to think about what you want the learner to do within the task. You may already have some activities you've developed yourself. You could also look at some existing print-based resources relating to the curriculum goal for ideas.

Get some examples of the activities you might use.

Each target web page is about something. You'll need to identify which of the existing topics you will create a task for. If there is no topic suitable, ask the Strand Leader to create one for you.

Choose the topic.

Having identified the task and the topic, you now need to find a suitable web page to be the target of the task. You may already have one in mind – reading the paper and professional journals can be a good source of ideas for target pages.

Web pages can be evaluated according to a range of design criteria, and numerous websites and books provide criteria for judging quality. However,

the main concern you should have is to do with *appropriacy* rather than appearance. There are three key questions to answer:

- Is the language suitable for the curriculum level?
- Does this page contain good examples of the elements being addressed?
- Is the treatment of content accurate and authoritative?

### Creating a task

Now that you have the ingredients for the task, it's time to put them together. The following steps can be done online at the VILC site or offline on your wordprocessor. We'll do them offline for convenience.

The following sections follow the fields of the task as it displays online. Use the following headings in your Word document to build the task.

The first section sets the context and outlines the task. It summarises your preparation.

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
What is the task about?	This task is about a famous Melbourne tourist attraction, the Melbourne Zoo.	Single sentence.
What will the student do?	You will answer some questions about the Zoo. Then you will write a report about the Zoo.	One sentence for each activity below.
Why is the student doing the task?	This task will help you to (reach a certain curriculum goal).	A restatement of the curriculum element.
Is the student ready for this?	If you are not sure how to use <i>Realweb</i> , click <b>here</b> .	Links to 'How to do a <i>Realweb</i> task' – generic help on task processes.

There will be a minimum of four steps and probably no more than six (ie three activities).

### Step 1

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
Orientation  The purpose of Step 1 is always for the student to visit the target web page and have a positive encounter with it.	What animals do you think you will see at the Melbourne Zoo?  Click on <b>Start the Task</b> . Look at the Melbourne Zoo web page. Did you think of these animals?  Click on Back to come <b>back</b> here.	The activity should be simple, but relevant, and should be easy to complete and certain of success.

## Step 2

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
<p>Activity</p> <p>A detailed statement of exactly what to do and how to do it, for one defined part of the task only.</p>	<p>Write answers to these questions. You will find the information on the Zoo web page.</p> <p>How old is the Zoo?</p> <p>How many animals are there, etc?</p> <p>To go to the page, click the <b>Forward</b> button.</p> <p>To read the questions again, click the <b>Back</b> button.</p> <p>To check your answers, click the <b>Answers</b> (currently Help) button.</p>	<p>Separate discrete elements within the task into activities.</p> <p>Avoid having them click through the target site.</p> <p>Remind them of navigation. Use <b>Forward</b> and <b>Back</b> so that students don't have to scroll.</p> <p>Show them how to finish.</p>

## Step 3

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
<p>Activity</p> <p>A detailed statement of exactly what to do and how to do it, for one part of the task only.</p>	<p>Use your answers to write a report, by connecting your sentences into a paragraph.</p> <p>Click on the <b>Help</b> button for hints.</p> <p>When you have finished, click on <b>Answers</b> to see a similar report.</p>	<p>Clearly separate <i>online</i> and <i>offline</i> activities.</p> <p>If you have language-focused activities, put them under Language (currently Interesting site).</p>

## Step 4

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
<p>Recap</p> <p>Bring the task to a close.</p>	<p>Check your answer.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Check your work with your teacher.</p>	<p>Is it clear that they've finished?</p> <p>How will they know if they've completed the task successfully?</p>

## Step 5

Rationale	Example	Characteristics
<p>Next</p> <p>How will they know what to do next?</p>	<p>Look at the rest of the website.</p> <p>Click on <b>Language</b> for grammar practice.</p> <p>Click on <b>Discussion</b> to tell others about the Zoo.</p> <p>Go to <i>Easynews</i> for a news item.</p>	<p>Give some choices.</p> <p>Use one of the numerous grammar exercise sites, such as <a href="http://www.aitech.org.jn">www.aitech.org.jn</a>, as a source of exercises.</p>

Note that the items Task, Steps and Go to web page are compulsory. Other items, however, are optional. If you do not write anything for them, the buttons will not display on your task.

In Help, write any information that will help the learner successfully complete the task. It could be a sample of the target text, for example, or a list of vocabulary. If the target text has certain features that must be included, put them here.

Answers – If your activities involve questions, give the answers here.

Go to web page 2 – If you have found another site that might be of interest, include its address here.

Language practice – There are many sites offering grammar practice, usually self-correcting. You can include a link to one here.

Discussion – There is a link to the discussion area for the curriculum on every task. You may like to post a message at the discussion area relating to your task. It could be of general interest, or specifically related to your own class.

Listen – You can record the task instructions so that they can be played like the audio in an *Easynews* task.