Producing Tasks for the Classroom
(QatarTESOL, 2017)

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE:

1. Sensitizing activity
2. Introduction
3. Context
4. Literature review
5. Methodology
6. Findings
7. Discussion
8. Implications

Any questions?
1 SENSITIZING ACTIVITY

Brainstorm key words / phrases for what makes a task an effective learning tool:

- engaging
- learner outcome
- degree of difficulty
- ???
1.2 INTRODUCTION

- This study represents one part of my doctoral dissertation studying the activities of materials writers working in the Sultanate of Oman …

- … to discover how writers approach the complex work of producing tasks for the English language classroom
2 CONTEXT

- Twenty writers out of approximately forty writers producing materials in the north of the Sultanate …
- … mainly in secondary and tertiary institutions
- … in the public and private sectors …
- … covering mostly EAP and ESP
3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-task considerations:

- Tasks should fulfill learners’ present and future needs as identified by the needs analysis (NA) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)
- The NA should discover learners’ genuine needs (Richards, 2001)
- Tasks should ensure the training objectives (TOs) and learner outcomes (LOs) are met as per the syllabus, which forms the framework for the course (Tudor, 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Syllabus content</th>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2.14</td>
<td>used to understand and use the verb form ‘used to’</td>
<td>Effective learners are able to:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerations during writing:

- Tasks should be sufficiently challenging (Tomlinson, 2011)
- Tasks should look professional to motivate learners (McGrath, 2002)
- Tasks should have face validity (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)
- Task writers need to grade:
  - language
  - content
  - tasks (McGrath, 2002)
Considerations during writing cont’d:

- Task writers need to produce tasks in line with learners’ and teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and expectations (Tudor, 2001)
- Task writers need to base tasks on locally-appropriate teaching methodologies (Gray, 2010)
- Task writers can use authentic material to provide preparation for real-world scenarios but … (Thornbury, 2005)
- … be prepared to choose between authentic and created according to learners’ abilities and needs (Harwood, 2010)
3.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerations during writing cont’d:

- Teacher’s notes should include:
  - methodological assumptions
  - appropriate classroom methodology such as:
    - prompts
    - options for exploiting the materials
    - alternative procedures
    - optional supplementary tasks / sub-tasks
  - answer keys
  - extra support for novice teachers
  - important cultural aspects relating to task use
3.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-task actions:

- Pilot the tasks to get feedback from:
  - teachers
  - learners
  - examiners
  - colleagues
  - domain experts

Learner Questionnaire

Please answer the questions below by ticking (✔) the correct option and write a few words to explain your answer. This is to help the English department improve the course for future students. Thank you.

- Re-write in reaction to feedback
- Re-pilot tasks
4 METHODOLOGY

My research:

- Interpretative + social constructivist
- For this aspect of my doctoral research:
  - a ranking survey (quantitative)
  - a Likert-scale survey written data (qualitative)
  - interviews (qualitative)

- Resulting data were then …
  - analyzed, coded and collated
  - codes → categories → themes → findings
5.1 FINDINGS

Writers’ views of producing tasks:

The importance of context- and needs-related tasks

\[ a = \text{essential} \quad b = \text{very important} \quad c = \text{important} \quad d = \text{somewhat important} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>I think this item is ...</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>c</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAQ 26</td>
<td>Context-related and needs-related tasks n=20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 WRITERS’ PRODUCING TASKS

Written or verbal responses

Steve:
What are the aims of this course? Needs
What do the owners of the course Wants
want out of it?

Tara:
I would always want to start from TOs and LOs
the outcomes and objectives … they have to be carefully
considered based on all the stakeholders’ needs

Coding

Needs Analysis
Schedule:
Jan 11th-15th Domain experts
Jan 18th - 22nd Course graduates
Jan 25th – 29th Current teachers
### 5.3 WRITERS’ PRODUCING TASKS

<table>
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<th>Coding</th>
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</table>

**Ray:**

... instructions ... examples ... **Grade**

meanings ... the length of a text ... number of tasks in a lesson, I try to think of them

**Keith:**

... really important ... content is **Challenge learners**

appropriate – pitched slightly beyond the perceived level of proficiency
5.4 WRITERS’ PRODUCING TASKS

### Written or verbal responses

Orson:
If students can see that materials lead directly towards their final examination ... they are more likely to accept them and try to do well.

Julie:
culture is extremely important when ... you produce materials otherwise you will lose your learners / customers.

### Coding

Face validity
Locally-appropriate
Written or verbal responses

Sidney: They’re more interested … in technology … they would rather have something about the latest mobile phone

Julie: I will adjust the (content) to the learners’ level of competence but (for) advanced students … I will be keeping the text … in an authentic (form)

Coding

Real-world content

Authentic / created

Taken from www.samsung.com
## 5.6 WRITERS’ PRODUCING TASKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written or verbal responses</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heather: [\ldots] in re-designing the book, the goal was to make it ‘first-time teacher-friendly’, for somebody who has never taught the course. Heather: I give teacher surveys [\ldots] (and) meetings [\ldots] What possibly needs to be modified or improved or what the teachers felt the problems were.</td>
<td>Teacher’s notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Producing tasks for the classroom requires teachers / writers to:

- fulfill the needs as set out in the TOs / LOs
- focus on the local learning context
- consider learners’ backgrounds, interests and wants
- challenge learners without de-motivating them
- link the classroom to real-world scenarios and needs
- give effective support to learners and teachers
- pilot and re-write tasks from piloting feedback
7 IMPLICATIONS

- writing tasks necessitates the drawing up of a detailed checklist of considerations specifically formulated for target-learners and teachers
- writers of tasks should aim for professionally-designed materials to ensure learner motivation leading to successful learning
- writers should be ready to change tasks and materials in response to feedback from stakeholders and to changing needs and modernization in our fast-moving world
Thank you for listening ....

Any Questions?

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