

<b>Institution:</b> St Mary's University College
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29: English Language and Literature
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Towards a researched pedagogy in modern language classrooms; guiding pedagogic choices through empirical findings.</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study explores practical pedagogic implications of research into task-based modern language classrooms through hosting a series of in-service training seminars for language teachers at venues in London and the South East. This has involved small-group meetings with staff in language schools in Central London, Richmond upon Thames, Brighton and Bournemouth, as well as trainee teachers in Kingston. The research findings, that the design and implementation of classroom tasks can positively influence the way the learners do the tasks, have informed teachers' attitudes to task-based lesson planning in a principled and empirically sound way.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research studies have shown that post-task activities and narrative task design produce effects on the fluency, accuracy and complexity of second language performance in ways that are likely to be supportive of second language (L2) development. Specifically, the results indicate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive tasks support greater L2 complexity and accuracy than non-interactive tasks;</li> <li>• A post-task activity (i.e. a self-transcription exercise) is associated with greater L2 accuracy;</li> <li>• Narrative tasks with dual story lines are associated with greater L2 syntactic complexity;</li> <li>• Narrative tasks with tightly structured storylines are associated with greater L2 accuracy.</li> </ul> <p>The research studies from which these findings arise were carried out over a ten-year period from 1999 and 2009. From 1999 Pauline Foster was 0.5 FTE Senior Lecturer at St. Mary's and 0.5 Research Assistant at King's College London. She became full-time at St. Mary's in 2003. She was promoted to Reader in 2006 and then to Professor in 2009. Some of the studies underpinning the impact case study were done in collaboration with Peter Skehan (then at King's College). Others were funded by an ESRC grant RES-000-22-1155 for a project entitled 'Information foregrounding in narrative tasks for second language classrooms' (For more information see the End of Award report June 2006 on <a href="http://tinyurl.com/gh7bj3h">http://tinyurl.com/gh7bj3h</a>) Pauline Foster was Principal Investigator on this project and Parvaneh Tavakoli was employed as a full-time research assistant for one year.</p> <p>To enhance the 'ecological validity' of the research and thus its potential for practical applications in language classrooms, recordings were collected wherever possible during scheduled and intact language classes where learners were accustomed to interacting with each other on language tasks. When it was not possible to collect the oral data during a class, the participants were nevertheless drawn from intact classes, knew each other well and were used to working together in a classroom situation. Moreover, the tasks used in these studies to</p>

generate data (discussions and picture narratives) were all designed for use in classrooms. It was intended from the beginning to have data that would correspond in some large measure to authentic communicative classrooms, rendering pedagogical interpretations more valid and reliable.

The step from research findings to pedagogic guidance should never be taken too quickly, given the enormously varied types of classrooms, but these studies were specifically designed to deliver broad guidance rather than narrow prescription.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Skehan, P. and Foster, P. (1999) 'The influence of task structure and processing conditions on narrative retellings' *Language Learning*, 49. 1. 93-120.
2. Foster, P. and Skehan, P. (1999) 'The influence of source of planning and focus of planning on task-based performance' *Language Teaching Research*, 3. 215-247.
3. Skehan, P. and Foster, P. (2005) 'Pre-task and On-line Planning: The influence of surprise information and task time on second language performance' in R. Ellis (ed) *Task-Based Language Teaching*: Longman (pp 193-218).
4. Tavakoli, P. and Foster, P. (2008) Task design and second language performance: the effect of narrative type on learner output. *Language Learning*, 58.2. 439-473.
5. Foster, P. and Skehan, P. (2013) The effects of post-task activities on the accuracy of language during task performance. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 69.3. 249-273.

Evidence of the quality of this research is that all the articles above appear in international peer-reviewed journals; that they have been the basis for many presentations at major conferences such as BAAL 1999, AAAL 2003, PACSLRF 2006, LTRT 2006, and the fact that Tavakoli and Foster (2008) was reprinted in P. Robinson (ed.) *Task-based Language Learning* (2011) Best of Language Learning Series. Michigan: Wiley-Blackwell. pp 37-72. This is a collection representing outstanding articles published by the journal.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Aspects of the body of empirical work on task-based language learning and teaching, as laid out in section 3 above, formed the basis of in-service training sessions during 2012-2013 for language teachers in four language schools, and also two sessions with trainee teachers at the University of Kingston. The seven 90 minute sessions were based on a description of selected findings, followed by discussion with the audience of the potential pedagogical implications and how they could be applied to the practical teaching situation these people worked in or would be working in.

While research articles in second language acquisition tend to report findings and then suggest pedagogical implications and applications, this is done without engaging in direct dialogue with

practitioners. The sessions described here were therefore somewhat unusual - and arguably much more impactful - in engaging in direct dialogue with the research 'consumers' and taking into account their views of the practical possibilities of altering pedagogic practice in line with the research evidence.

**Details of the beneficiaries** – Each of the seven sessions was delivered to between 15 and 20 people. They were either highly experienced practising teachers of English as a Foreign Language at the British Study Centres (BSC) in London, Brighton, and Bournemouth, at the Richmond Adult and Community College (RACC) or else were trainee teachers on the Kingston University MA programme in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

**Details of the nature of the impact** – The ultimate nature of the impact would be a long-term alteration in the teaching practice of these teachers, brought about by an understanding of the research and seeing how their professional practice could benefit from it. This is being assessed through the planned follow-up sessions through 2013-2014. A more quickly realised impact and one that could be gauged after the sessions through a questionnaire, is an altered view of the possibilities of classroom tasks, and a determination to design their class activities in the light of the discussions in the training sessions.

**Evidence or indicators of the extent of the impact.** At the end of each session, feedback sheets were given to each participant for them to record how useful they found them, and the extent to which they will adjust their teaching practice in the light of what they have learned. There are 67 available for scrutiny. All comments were positive about the usefulness of the sessions. Most reported that they would use the insights in their practice, though very small minority expressed caution about how they could incorporate the research into their daily working lives. Typical comments are exemplified by the following quotations:

*Very thought-provoking, thank you.*

*The session will affect the choice and level of tasks I give to students.*

*It will definitely make me think more carefully about the tasks I select.*

*I will be more aware in future of picture sequencing.*

*I will use this information to more accurately target lesson aims.*

*I have a clearer understanding of how the design of a task impacts on the complexity, accuracy and fluency of non-native English.*

*I will definitely remember to give planning time before every task.*

*I will definitely give more consideration to designing tasks.*

*I will be more selective in choosing materials for a given task, knowing the implications they have on learner performance.*

*I will definitely use the various pictures to focus on different types of output (...) and develop my own accordingly.*

*I understand better what impacts on different levels of performance.*

*I will definitely use tighter structures if I want to focus on accuracy.*

*I intend to test the data presented here, and am encouraged to focus on colloquial and idiomatic English in class.*

*I'll use picture sequences more often in class.*

I have been invited back by all these organisations to give further sessions, and intend to

establish a long-term agreement to give research-based talks on a regular basis. As laid out in section 3 of this form, there is a lot of research that could be drawn on.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The following people can corroborate that an in-service training session was delivered at their organisations between October 2012 and July 31<sup>st</sup> 2013, and can provide more information on the impact this had.

1. Director of English as Foreign Language  
Richmond Adult and Community College,

2. Academic Director  
British Study Centre  
London

3. Academic Director  
British Study Centre  
Brighton, East Sussex

4. Academic Director  
British Study Centre  
Bournemouth

5. Course leader: MA Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching  
Kingston University

The written feedback from individual teachers is available for inspection from Pauline Foster.