

Deep-end Tasks for Low-level Learners



This presentation will explore the following areas :

- ❑ Aims and background
- ❑ What is the ‘deep-end strategy’
- ❑ Balance sheet – traditional v deep-end approach
- ❑ Critiques and potential shortcomings
- ❑ What we did – teacher interventions
- ❑ Preliminary conclusions

04 January 2012

- **Aim:** To investigate the effects of deep end tasks on low level foundation students
- **Background:** Certain activities popular:
 - Non-stop writing for research students at a workshop on ‘Overcoming writers block’
 - Writing a letter of complaint for foundation students
 - Performing a 2-minute Shakespeare play for pre-sessional students

The first time of Romeo and Juliet



Shakespeare task

Transcended 'language-like' behaviour and went beyond task to reveal new truths

Earlier communicative tasks

Successful because needs-based at level of individual learner

What is the 'deep-end strategy'?

- An approach to teaching which turns conventional procedure on its head. See Johnson (1982) & Brumfit (1979).

Traditional procedure is typically:



'Deep-end strategy'

Stage 1 - Students communicate with available resources

Stage 2 - Teacher presents items shown to be necessary

Stage 3 - Drill if necessary

(Johnson, 1982: 193)

Or reverse of traditional procedure:



Balance sheet (Brumfit, 1978, 1979)



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Traditional approach	Deep end tasks
language as knowledge (an accuracy-based curriculum) = a deficit model	all process no product = absence of any judgements, so no need for classroom
too much foreign language emphasis on linguistic models is disastrous	an emphasis on use not possession of the TL
written forms dominate spoken	SS errors are essential to learning
'accuracy' = a relative term based on social judgements and idealisation	learner improvisation is central to language use because language learning is a process
language is more than communication: aesthetic creation, thought clarification, self-definition ...	uncontrolled practice exercises SS' unpredictable abilities
learners are naturally resistant to an idealised model of accuracy	a generative view of language = a system with semantic potential
words are not just pre-agreed tokens representing permanent and immutable features of the universe - negotiation is the basis of human interaction	diagnostic
	motivational
Sussex Centre for Language Studies Simon Williams & Yolanda Cerdá	learners intuitively recognise the flexibility of the language system

Helen Johnson (1992)

- Corrective teacher feedback essential to achieve language change
- ‘fluent-but-fossilised’ students have no incentive to change because the ‘deep end strategy’ reinforces ‘coping mechanisms’

K Johnson (1982:198)

- May require ‘huge resources’ and ‘nerves of steel’ – because teachers may not be able to prepare in advance
- There would need to be ‘a bank of resources to select from’ –involves a ‘drastic change in the role of materials.’

At the same time...

- ‘Communicative interaction [shows] unconfident students that they can cope communicatively’ and
- The conventional procedure is no better because students have ‘no personal investment in the teaching phase’ (H. Johnson, 1992: 185)
- For teaching purposes, some prediction of language ss ‘may have wanted to use’ may help with planning (a compromise?) (K. Johnson 1982: 198)

- available 'attention' to error correction in communicative tasks is insufficient for learning
- Johnson (1992) prescribes 'Tennis clinic strategy':
 1. T sets communicative goal
 2. SS plan language needs
 3. SS learn by conferring individually with T
 4. SS communicate

Language Learning and Other Skills Learning

- Traditionally language learning has been viewed as separate to other types of learning (influence of Chomsky's LAD etc.)
- However, language very similar to other skills in that it has both a knowledge and performance (declarative / procedural) aspect (eg driving, singing, etc.)
- Some sport and other performance-based skills training use pre-task - task - post-task approach; but others use deep-end strategy.
- Both cases include a huge amount of T feedback on performance-induced mistakes.
- It is usually *needs-based* (unlike traditional language teaching, which is *competence-based*) (Johnson and Jackson, 2006:544)

Learning engages the entire person (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains), the human brain seeks patterns in its searching for meaning, emotions affect all aspects of learning, retention and recall, past experience always affects new learning, the brain's working memory has a limited capacity, lecture usually results in the lowest degree of retention, rehearsal is essential for retention, practice [alone] does not make perfect, and each brain is unique.

(Sousa, 2006: 274)

Thus, language learning is more like weight-training than H Johnson's notion of the 'tennis clinic': only exercise to failure will constitute progress.

Easy accuracy = mediocrity (<IELTS 6)

It's the feedback that counts.

Our interventions

Summary of data

Date	Students	Mode	Outcome
December 2010	Pre-Masters low level	<u>Conventional</u> Presentation and practice Production: SS interviews SS reports (oral + written)	Success in simple question forms; failure or avoidance strategies in complex forms
January 2011	Pre-Masters low level	<u>Deep end</u> Listening Note-taking Interviews	Vocab limitations Cultural knowledge Experience Integrating skills

Simon's research: Traditional procedure

Present - Drill - Practise in context (Johnson, 1982: 192)

Example

Question form word order

PM students: 'What mean X?'

Regular teacher correction

Lesson practising form (present - drill)

Students' question forms regularly corrected in class

Lesson presenting and drilling question forms - Friday, 19 November 2010 (Week 7)

Production:

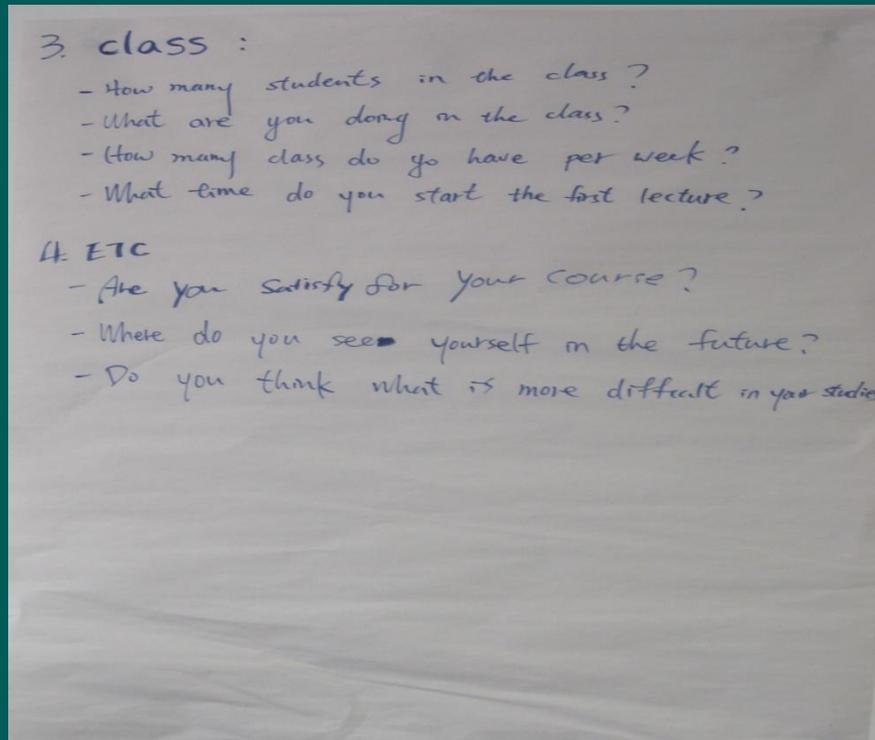
Planning: students brainstormed questions - Thursday, 25 November 2010 (Week 8)

Students interviewed Masters students - Wednesday, 1 December 2010 (Week 9)

Reported to students on another course - Wednesday, 8 December 2010 (Week 10)

Wrote up in a newsletter for new students - Friday, 10 December 2010 (Week 10)

Students brainstormed questions - Thursday, 25 November 2010 (Week 8)



**Students interviewed Masters students -
Wednesday, 1 December 2010 (Week 9)**

**Students reported to students on another course -
Wednesday, 8 December 2010 (Week 10)**

Students wrote up interviews in a newsletter for new students - Friday, 11 December 2010 (Week 10)

Question forms in deep end task series



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	Direct questions	Indirect questions	Reported questions complex sentences	Reported questions simple sentences	Indirect reported speech	Direct reported speech
Poster plan	8					
Interview	6 (4)	1 (2)				
Presentation			(1)	1	1 (1)	(1)
Newsletter			(1)	1	(1)	

Deep-end listening?

Yolanda's study

Study:

- SS listened to half a pre-session lecture on 'UK Jury System' (25 mins): though legal topic, was not overly specialised and of general cultural interest?
- Realistic task with visual support
- Ss were asked to listen and take full notes, which would be used to answer comprehension questions
- Comprehension questions designed to check gist understanding and specific details as well as ability to make inferences about speaker's position (important academic skill?)
- Data Analysis based on: pre-listening and post-listening questionnaires, interviews with SS, listening comprehension questions & ss notes.

Deep-end listening

Preliminary Findings

- **Listening Comprehension results:**
- 71% of ss obtained between 40-53% correct answers
- the rest (2) obtained between 65-75%
- When asked what the lecturer's position was on his topic (in favour or against jury) 85% did not know or answered incorrectly
- Therefore, obvious room for improvement
- Need to evaluate where communication has broken down/ what listening and academic skills need developing?

Deep-end listening Preliminary Findings

Questionnaire Data:

Pre-listening questionnaire:

- 100% of ss agreed or strongly agreed that academic listening is an important activity
- 100% strongly agreed that it is important to be able to take good notes in lectures / seminars...
- 57% had little experience of lectures or did not find it easy to write notes
- Most questionnaires suggested that ss found it easier to note specific details (names, dates, etc.) than identify main ideas
- Therefore some initial needs / gaps already identified.

Deep-end listening

Preliminary Findings

Questionnaire Data:

Post-listening questionnaire (before comprehension task):

Reveals some contradictions;

- 71% agreed that they had understood the main points (not necessarily supported by comprehension questions)
- In general there was more uncertainty in responses (neither agree nor disagree)
- 71% believe they understood approximately between 60-80% of the lecture, while the rest believe they understood 30%.
- Many mentioned that they thought the lecture was clear and slow enough (so not seen as the main impediment to comprehension...)

Deep-end listening

Preliminary Findings

Initial Student Needs / Problems identified (by ss themselves):

- lack of subject vocabulary
- topic knowledge and interest
- inexperience (not listened to many lectures / taken notes)
- Inability to concentrate for long stretches of time
- difficulties doing tasks requiring integrated skills – listening, writing, reading at same time

Other potential areas for development:

- Cultural referents: Lecture was culturally ‘eurocentric’-mentions Lenin, Hitler, Franco, the US, Greek philosophers, - as support for the argument–some ss did not see the relevance of these figures to main point – impeded inference.
- Note-taking skills not always evident in notes handed in
- Not all students felt the slides were useful (in interviews), but evidence that they were used in note-taking

...but further analysis is still required

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Deep-end listening

So now what?

- Suggestions (in progress) for teaching:
 - need to generate interest / need to listen
 - cultural exposure / preparation is important
 - academic study skills (eg note-taking, etc.) should be focused on
 - vocabulary input may be necessary or some linguistic preparation through a reading for e.g.
- **Next stage?**
 - How will incorporating the above affect SS performance?
 - Is this still 'the deep-end' or the next stage of a recursive procedure?

Conclusions: deep end tasks

- Classroom learning *from* deep-end tasks especially through feedback are essential for language and skills development
- Provide a useful diagnostic tool
- Offer extra-linguistic information (about the student)
- Goes beyond language as a closed system because involves learner and her background as a whole person (about the task)
- Holistic approach – highlights individual needs that often go beyond discrete language items and academic micro-skills
- Can give learners confidence

Students on Pre-sessional and Pre-Masters courses at
Sussex

Matthew Platts and Roland Mathews for audiovisual
technical support

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