Teachers' roles in designing meaningful tasks for mediating language learning through the use of ICT: A reflection on authentic learning for young ELLs

Le rôle des enseignants dans la conception de tâches pertinentes en apprentissage des langues au moyen des TIC: Une réflexion sur l'apprentissage authentique pour les jeunes apprenants d'ALS.

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Abstract

Task based learning (TBL) continues to evolve as information and communication technology (ICT) inspired tools and teaching approaches afford the possibilities of transforming students' learning experiences by heightening their motivation and sense of autonomy and in turn, their vocabulary development. To capture this synergy, teachers will need to reimagine authentic learning and task design. This paper describes and reflects on the shifting demands and roles of the teacher in the elementary school setting. An illustrative sample of a series of linked tasks provides a model for pre-service teachers as they take on the work of preparing meaningful work for ELLs who are increasingly present in today's mainstream class settings.

Key words: task based learning (TBL), information and communication technology (ICT), English language learners (ELLs), vocabulary

Résumé

L'apprentissage par tâches continue d'évoluer au fur et à mesure que les outils et les approches pédagogiques inspirés des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) permettent de transformer les expériences d'apprentissage des étudiants en stimulant leur motivation, leur sens de l'autonomie et, finalement, l'enrichissement de leur vocabulaire. Pour réaliser cette synergie, les enseignants devront réinventer l'apprentissage authentique et la conception des tâches. Cet article décrit et réfléchit aux changements d'exigences et de rôles de l'enseignant à l'école primaire. Un échantillon représentatif d'une série de tâches connectées fournit un modèle pour les futurs enseignants qui se lancent dans la préparation d'un travail sérieux pour les étudiants d'ALS, aujourd'hui de plus en plus nombreux dans l'enseignement général.

Introduction

Canadian classrooms of the 21st century face the challenges of educating linguistically diverse learners for participation in a complex, global economy that is predicated on high levels of literacy. The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT) convergent with refinements in our understanding of how task based learning (TBL) can be mapped to curriculum offers the potential to transform the teaching-learning equation. Successfully implemented, the integration of TBL and ICT can engage young learners and teachers in pathways to accelerated and extended language learning opportunities by providing learners with tools and opportunities to take increasing responsibility for their language learning outcomes. They are driven by the motivational "hook" of the contexts in which tasks are embedded, and of course, the lure of the array of ICT available to them: www, YouTube clips, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email and the digital devices that permit access and use of these ICT, to name just a few.

Creatively exploiting the combined potential of ICT and TBL makes significant demands on teachers if their students are to realize the benefits of both. From first hand experiences as a teacher and as a "teacher of teachers" I reflect on the role of teachers as well as the needs of students in a university teacher preparation program as they learn to juggle the many intricacies of good task design that will foster English language development in the context of the elementary mainstream classroom.

The broad questions that guide this reflection on the role of teachers and teacher preparation students can be stated this way:

- What are the features of TBL that must be considered in the design of learning experiences for young ELLs that can enhance their language learning, especially their academic vocabulary development?

- How can ICT be integrated into TBL to transform the learning experiences for young ELLs?

- What types of learning experiences will help becoming teachers design meaningful tasks for their future students?

Context of this reflective inquiry

The Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, prepares teacher candidates largely for careers in the various local school boards. I am a faculty member, instructing course work at the baccalaureate level (B.Ed.) to elementary route students interested in developing their capacity to work with English language learners (ELLs) in the context of the mainstream classroom. A key feature of Calgary's demographic landscape that it shares with other urban settings across Canada is its rapid shift to include far more linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly in kindergarten to grade 3 settings: most of these youngsters are the Canadian born children of immigrants who speak a language other than English at home. Elementary route B.Ed. students drawn to my course have had preliminary, classroom observation experiences and are cognizant of the challenges they will face in responding to the language learning needs of this growing demographic. Their major practicum course is yet to come.

In addition to my responsibilities as a faculty member, I volunteer as a tutor with a group of young ELLs on Monday evenings. We are in our third year together. My "Monday kids" are comprised of three young Urdu speaking learners aged 8 to 11 years (Canadian born). I travel to their home for two hours of intensive work. The goal of these tutoring sessions is to support the transition from the early stages of literacy development to academic literacy. Many young ELLs demonstrate strengths with the basic skills of printing/writing, phonics understandings needed to decode, and spelling (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009): pre-requisites for the development of beginning writing. Immigrant parents, for their part, expect and value direct instruction and practice that will develop these foundational skills for literacy development (Li, 2006). More challenging for the children is the development of academic modes of discourse which are predicated on a robust vocabulary. By Alberta Education's ESL Benchmarks standards (Alberta education, 2010), these students would be level 4: fully integrated into the inclusive mainstream class setting, however, still needing language learning support, especially vocabulary development, to successfully manage grade appropriate materials and expectations. Few ELLs at this level are provided with any direct, dedicated ESL support, including these three young students. Over time, many of these students fall increasingly behind their age peers in their academic achievement, largely due to their linguistic vulnerability (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009).

These experiences, both as a faculty member and as tutor to young ELLs, offer the unique opportunity to prepare and implement ICT/TBL inspired instruction to my tutoring group, and then to model the process for the B.Ed. students in my class. An additional benefit is the ability to step back from both campus and Monday evening tutoring in a cycle of noticing, reflecting and planning anew.

Reflection boxes interspersed throughout this article highlight understandings gleaned from stepping back and using these insights to enhance my work as a faculty member.

The section that follows provides the theoretical framings for the work at hand.

Theoretical framework

This work draws on the research literature in the broad fields of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and ICT, TBL in English as a second language (Bygate, n.d.; Nunan, 1991, 1994; Skehan, 1996, 2003), and language through content (LTC) teaching and learning (Crandall, 1994; Richards, 2006). Foundational to all of these, however, is the crucial need for ELLs to develop a robust vocabulary (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005). This section briefly reviews the relevant literature from these streams of research, proceeding in the reverse order noted above to underscore the importance of the language foundation that must be built as a consequence of well-designed learning tasks.

ELLs, Vocabulary Learning and Academic Literacy

There is increasing recognition in the research literature related to the crucial role of vocabulary knowledge in the longitudinal academic outcomes of ELLs. Literacy development depends on a strong, robust vocabulary as a foundation (Biemiller, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2012; Senechal, Ouellette & Rodney, 2006) especially in the critical stage of shifting from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Failure to make this transition is associated with the phenomenon identified in the literature as "the grade 4 slump" (Chall & Jakobs, 2003): a low plateau in the development of

reading comprehension associated with a lack of vocabulary knowledge. Children can achieve early literacy benchmarks with only a limited vocabulary of perhaps 1,000 high frequency word families (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009) – the words associated with conversational fluency. However, the transition to academic literacy requires a critical mass of vocabulary estimated at around 8,000 word families growing to approximately 18,000 word families by high school graduation; a rate of approximately 1,000 word families for each year of educational advancement (Nation & Waring, 1997). Children raised in poverty (Chall & Jakobs, 2003) and ELLs (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005) are at heightened academic risk as a consequence of low levels of vocabulary knowledge. These researchers underscore the importance of addressing this need in the context of the mainstream classroom.

There is a strong consensus surrounding the principles of vocabulary teaching. These include the instructional mandates of teaching vocabulary in context and focusing on the meanings of words (Weizman & Snow, 2001), rather than as isolated lists to be memorized or definitions to be looked up and copied from the dictionary. Torr and Scott (2006), and Roessingh and Douglas (2013) highlight the importance of introducing children to sophisticated vocabulary through activities such as shared reading and academic conversations with the goal of raising the lexical bar. What native speaking (NS) youngsters *acquire* from exposure and interactions with their parents at home (Beals, 1997), ELLs must *learn* from their teachers through explicit, direct and intentional instruction (Biemiller, 2001). Teachers must also be highly strategic in choosing the words to target; while NS may have the luxury of time, immersion and incidental exposure to sophisticated vocabulary input at home, teachers must make every minute of their instructional hours with ELLs "count."

Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002) advance a three-tiered model of vocabulary. *Tier 1* is comprised of high frequency, concrete and contextualized vocabulary ("here and now" words) that children appear to acquire fairly readily from everyday interactions and conversations on topics that are familiar and predictable. *Tier 2* words are the mid- range words that have high academic utility and generalizability across the curriculum. They often reflect procedures such as *investigate, examine, experiment, create, design, construct, observe, dispose* versus the more familiar *check, test, find out, make, draw, build, look, throw out*; they usually have Latin roots, they are more cognitively complex and they afford nuance and precision of meaning. *Tier 3* involves discipline specific vocabulary such as *mitosis, photosynthesis, zygote*. The meaning of these words is generally transparent: they can be looked up in a dictionary, or often, a glossary in the textbook used will provide a definition. Snow (2010) notes that teachers are generally sensitive to the specific vocabulary demands of their content area, and increasingly spend time highlighting and teaching these words. *Tier 2* words, however, are often overlooked by teachers. It is the *Tier 2* words, therefore, that need to be the focus of more explicit instruction.

 A final point related to vocabulary development relates to the incremental, gradual nature of this process: from recognizing a word and "having it" in the receptive reservoir to being able to spontaneously retrieve a word and using it correctly in context in productive efforts ('owning it') takes time, many exposures and opportunities to practice, manipulate and transform new vocabulary across modalities (Stahl, 2003). Listening, speaking, reading and writing need to be integrated into meaningful work. The next section addresses ways that teachers can support learning vocabulary by presenting and working with them in context.

Language through content (LTC)

The LTC approach is closely aligned with communicative language teaching (CLT), the origins of which are visible in the research literature some 20 - 25 years ago (Crandall, 1994; Reilley, 1988; Short, 1993). Its evolution in second language methodology coincides with a recognition that learning to *use* a second language is increasingly more important in contemporary, global contexts than learning *about* a second language in the tradition of grammar-translation and the structural language syllabus. LTC has variously been described as content and language integrated learning (CLIL, see Marsh, 2003), cognitive academic language learning (CALLA, see Chamot, 1995), and content-based instruction (CBI, see Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). It remains a dominant force in second language teaching and learning in a variety of contexts including foreign language instruction (Marsh, 2003). In school settings especially, students must learn both language and curriculum content concurrently: they do not have time to learn language today for some future intended goal (Marsh, 2003). LTC takes a dual focus, prizing both language and content learning goals.

In essence, LTC can be described as *principled* approach to language teaching and learning that focuses on providing *comprehensible input +1* (Krashen, 1982), *making meaning*, and the *purposeful use* of language for authentic ends or goals. The role of the learner as an active, engaged participant in the teaching-learning equation is paramount to successful second language development (Gibbons, 2002).

Integrating language and content instruction becomes increasingly important in the mainstream class setting as rapidly escalating numbers of immigrant children in the K – 12 system place heightened demands for English language learning support while proceeding with their regular curricular studies. Richards (2006) provides an excellent, accessible summary of the CLT/LTC paradigm, one that continues to evolve today with refinements to our understanding of how to operationalize principles of these approaches into classroom practices, and, as we shall see, the availability of technology inspired tools and techniques to supplement them.

TBL and thematic organization of content holds a great deal of promise as a heuristic for instructional planning (Roessingh, 2014; Sherris, 2008). A topic with high interest can provide the context and the motivational "hook," the invitation "in" to the frame of integrated, sequenced learning tasks (Gibbons, 2002). The sample in Appendix 1 illustrates how the thematic frame can be used as a planning tool to ensure that all of the language and curriculum concepts are addressed and tracked in the context, in this case, of The Puppy Naming Contest. Sustained engagement within this broad topic allows for multiple exposures, or recycling, of the key concepts and vocabulary and the opportunity to manipulate and transform them through well designed learning tasks. The frame presented here is one I developed over the years, and have used consistently in both undergraduate and graduate teaching settings. Readers are welcome to explore the website www.esllearningbydesign.com for further information, guidance and models for completing their own thematic template online.

TBL in English as a second language

The shift from traditional approaches to teaching second languages to LTC/CLT necessitated a concomitant shift in classroom practices from translation exercises and grammar worksheets, to work that would involve the negotiation of meaning, problem solving, strategy use, critical thinking, and the purposeful and authentic *use* of language for some real-life goal (Bygate, n.d.; Crookes & Long, 1987; Ellis, 2000, 2005; Nunan, 1991, Skehan, 1996, 2001). Nunan (2004) a

pioneer in task based teaching and learning who has had a deep and enduring influence in TBL posits the following definition of a pedagogical task:

> a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate the form. (p. 3)

Nunan's book, *Task Based Language Teaching* (2004) is available online, and is an accessible and reasonably current resource suitable for undergraduate students in a general teacher preparation program.

The initial attempts at TBL often involved contrived, "one shot" tasks (Ur, 1984) such as listening to a taped air pilot announcement to identify errors ("We hope you enjoy the crash."), or debating who should be ejected from a balloon to keep it afloat (Ellis, 2006, p. 23). These evolved to more authentic tasks such as sitting a job interview, applying for a credit card or checking into a hotel where there is a sense of completeness to each episode or interaction. Tasks developed to more sustained, well-integrated, sequenced and linked work that reflects the idea of *design* or *pedagogical intent* (Rodriguez-Bonces, 2010). Authenticity is a central requirement: there must be some real-world purpose and application of the task undertaken for an audience other than the teacher (Gibbons, 2009). Recognizing that the classroom is not the real world and that students require scaffolds, feedback, an atmosphere for risk-taking and making mistakes in order to become proficient enough to eventually transfer their learning outside of the classroom, I prefer the term *authentic-like* to reflect the idea of the learning progression.

Gibbons (2002, 2009) has long been an advocate of LTC and TBL. She underscores the idea of "rich tasks" (2009, p. 38), including the criteria of cognitive challenge that will require teacher scaffolding to support open ended, multi-stage projects that culminate in the production of some type of learning artifact (Moulds, 2002). In the Vygotskian tradition (1978) of mediating or scaffolding learning in the zone of proximal development (learning that is one step ahead of what the learner can do independently), Gibbons (2003, 2009) emphasizes the need to scaffold learning in what she describes as "the challenge zone." Scaffolds include a variety of temporary supports to facilitate language and content learning. Visual representations or key visuals (Mohan, 1986) such as time lines, charts, graphs, templates and well-chosen pictures are examples of effective scaffolds that mediate LTC learning and these should figure in any teacher's instructional repertoire.

The essence of TBL remains unchanged over the past 20 years, however, and as the basis for curriculum and instructional planning appears to have stood the test of time (Pica, 2005), expanding its reach into project based learning (PBL). One important insight that has become more salient is the need to sometimes provide direct instruction in knowledge or skills that are foundational to a specific task. Such instruction may be described as a pedagogical task or an "enabling activity" (Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language, 2012), and expands the construct of "task design" to accommodate this need. This might involve direct instruction in note taking or outlining using a template as a scaffold, or explicit instruction in the meaning of new vocabulary or concept information.

The call to merge TBL and ICT appears to solidify its hold in the classroom into the foreseeable future. In order to maximize the potential of ICT, however, TBL must foster the development of electronic/digital literacy and ICT skills. ICT must contribute to the meaningful process and completion of tasks, the topic of the following section.

Finally, to conclude this section, it should be noted that the bulk of the work and the research in TBL has been directed to an adult learner profile often in the *foreign* language learning context at lower (i.e. upper beginner to intermediate) language proficiency levels. The research literature related to its potential with young ELLs who must develop sufficient academic language and literacy proficiency to compete with their native speaking peers in the mainstream class setting remains under-developed.

ICT and CALL

The advent of ICT, its spread and availability worldwide over the past 30 years, as well as digital devices – of late the iPad, has had unmistakable impact on the classrooms of today. A review of the literature of the influence of ICT on a variety of measures such as student motivation, collaboration, independence, and school completion for example, all suggest positive outcomes (Alberta Education, 2007).

Less convincing however, is the connection between these outcomes and the longitudinal academic literacy outcomes as they are reflected in standard measures such as Alberta's Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), the Grade 12 Diploma examinations in English Language Arts, and Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) data. A concerning trend of collapsing test scores over the past five years is noted across Canada (Roessingh, 2012a; Roessingh & Douglas, 2011). It is not the computer itself, or the lab, or the software, or the independent research projects assigned to students that will make the difference; it is how these tools are put to use that needs to be under scrutiny. Recent work described by Jacobsen and Friesen (2013) indicates that classroom instruction is not keeping up with the accelerating development of technology that has the potential to involve students in more participatory, inquiry based modes of learning that involve academic rigor and authentic learning experiences. This sentiment is echoed by Hampel (2006), Lamy (2007), and Ortega (2009), all of who underscore the possibilities of ICT and CALL to enhance not only language learning, but students' sense of agency, identity, self-confidence and motivation, as these in turn might contribute to the development of language proficiency. Lai and Li (2011) provide a detailed review of the current literature on TBL and technology, and although focused largely on the adult learning context, there are lessons to be learned for the elementary school context.

Jacobsen and Friesen (2013) observe that technology is too easily used as either a toy, or a substitute for a textbook, neither of which take advantage of how ICT can be meaningfully incorporated into the classroom. A Google search using "ICT and ESL for young learners" yields a plethora of sites for games, exercises, flashcards, quizzes, ready-made lesson plans and printable worksheets. Convenient sites offer teachers the ability to make bingo cards, cloze exercises, puzzles, mix and match activities, traceable sheets for youngsters who need printing practice, and more. Prensky (2013) would describe such activities as "old activities in old ways" – level 2 in his 4 levels of technology implementation (LoTi) framework. While level 2 applications of ICT may be convenient and useful to a degree, LoTi levels 3 and 4 as described by Prensky have the possibility of fundamentally transforming how, where, and when we learn.

There has been accelerating growth in the applications and software specifically created to advance language learning. These place demands on teachers to rethink their classroom and instructional practices in K – 12 settings (Alberta Education 2003). The challenge to teachers is to devise ways, and to identify tools and resources that will exploit and "blend" ICT with face to face instruction in the service of advancing and accelerating language learning, merging ICT with TBL to accomplish this goal.

> **Reflection 1:** The current generation of teacher preparation candidates are digital natives (Prensky, 2001): they have grown up in the digital era and are comfortable with the devices and the programs available. Pre-service education students need structured learning experiences that will help them deploy their easy familiarity with the digital world into designing challenging academic work for their students that force them to synthesize and summarize information, think critically, and use language accurately and appropriately to accomplish real life tasks.

It would seem that this area of inquiry is still in its earliest of stages: the research agenda still in its infancy. There is a paucity of research documenting children's language learning outcomes as a consequence of their engagement either with ICT or TBL.

> **Reflection 2:** My B.Ed. students need accessible readings that provide the research and theoretical underpinnings to instructional planning for young children, many of whom are ELLs. To link theory to practice and to operationalize the principles of LCT/CLT, and TBL/ICT they will need a planning tool or framework. Finally, they will need a model to follow, and demonstrations of how to engage children in linked/sequenced tasks that build vocabulary and curricular concepts together. This is a tall order for pre-service teachers!

To bring this section to a close, the following key principles of vocabulary teaching and learning, LTC, TBL and ICT need to be considered in operationalizing a plan for curriculum and instruction:

1) Vocabulary and concept information must be *embedded* in motivating, interesting and personally relevant contexts that have the potential to engage learners in sustained, authentic-like work. Thematic development can achieve this (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989; Ritter, 1999).

2) Teachers should target their instruction slightly ahead of "where the students are at" – providing challenge, but not overwhelming them (Vygotsky, 1978).

3) Tasks should be organized around a *central problem* or *broad question* that promotes the integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing. *Multiple exposures* to new vocabulary and concepts is needed to practice, manipulate and transform them, resulting in robust learning (Stahl, 2003).

4) Teacher-led conversations can be a starting point for *providing sophisticated input* reflecting real-life issues and concerns, taken from informational texts – a key source of *Tier 2* words (Roessingh & Douglas, 2013).

5) New vocabulary and concept information should be made *explicit* and *taught directly* through an array of explanations, definitions, demonstrations and modelling, for example (Biemiller, 2001).

6) Tasks should be well designed to *scaffold* the completion of the work at hand (Gibbons, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

7) Tasks should be *sequenced* to incrementally move from teacher fronted to student directed opportunities for open-ended inquiry, knowledge creation and sharing (Gibbons, 2002).

8) ICT must be exploited to provide a platform to transform how learning occurs in the service of realizing the goals of principle #7, above (Hampel, 2006; Prensky, 2013).

Clearly, these principles must be applied while simultaneously consulting and making the linkages to the provincial ministry's mandated program of studies (Alberta Education, 2012) and the ESL benchmarks (Alberta Education, 2010).

**Example Mini-Project Involving Task Based Learning
For Children in Grades 3 – 5: Modeling the Process**

In this section, I provide an illustrative example of a mini-project for young ELLs and I describe the process of planning a sequence of learning tasks following a principled approach summarized above. The project culminates in submitting a name for a puppy naming contest which had been advertised in the local newspaper. I model this process for my campus based (B.Ed.) students, together with some direct instruction and readings related to task design and second language learning: in fact, structuring for *them* learning tasks such as a jigsaw reading of an academic article that will incrementally engage them in designing tasks within a thematic frame suitable for elementary aged ELLs in the mainstream.

Drawn to an article in the local newspaper (Ho, 2013) inviting children to submit names for a new-born litter of German Shepherd puppies that are bound for a working life as police service dogs, I consulted the Alberta Education (2003) guidelines for the ICT Program of Studies, the K – 3 program of studies summary charts (Alberta Education, 2012), and the Alberta Education English as a second language benchmarks documents (Alberta Education, 2010) in efforts to target curricular mandates within the context of my broad topic of service dogs. Next I proceeded to complete the thematic template allowing for the "big picture" planning to emerge and converge like a well-designed puzzle of interacting/interconnected elements. The embedded learning tasks would incrementally set us on the trajectory toward the deadline for the contest approximately one month later (Appendix 1). This topic fulfilled the criteria of authenticity in content and task design, and the potential to implement the eight key principles summarized in the foregoing section.

Naming contest for police puppies

Calgary Herald, Wednesday, February 20, 2013, B3

RCMP. A litter of furry future crime fighters need names, and the RCMP is asking young Canadians for suggestions.

Canadians aged 16 or younger are encouraged to submit names for 10 German shepherd puppies recently born or soon-to-be-born at the Police Dog Service Training Centre in Innisfail.

Names can be male or female, but this year must start with the letter F, have no more than nine letters and no more than two syllables. Only one entry is allowed per contestant.

The breeding program, which started in 1999, sees about 25 litters born each year. The training centre has graduated close to 200 RCMP service dogs.

About 85 per cent of canines working as police dogs within the RCMP were born at the centre. The deadline for entries is March 22 and contest winners will be announced April 16. Prizes include a laminated photo of the dog the winner named.

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http://www.calgaryherald.com/life/Young+Canadians+urged+name+next+generation+police+dogs/7987000/story.html

Figure 1. Catalyst for task design and curricular integration: Puppy naming contest

Reflection 3: The topic of the "Naming contest" was an immediate "hit" with the children. Reading both the hard copy and the online copy of the newspaper demonstrated that news media are accessible in different formats, and the online version is permanently available at the click of a mouse. Still, according to Prensky (2013) "old-old" LoTi. The children were instantly intrigued by the work of service dogs, and the challenge of coming up with a name that would fulfill the criteria mentioned in the contest rules. The only names for dogs starting with an "f" that they could come up with were Fluffy and Fifi. These were soon discarded as unsuitable for working dogs. They were also restricted in descriptive vocabulary for the puppy in the photo: cute, pretty, nice.

Ausubel (1968) writes, "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly" (p. 18). Gathering baseline information about what children already know about the topic at hand is, therefore, an important first step in deciding how and what to plan for next steps in children's learning. Tasks can be presented in the guise of low risk games and brainstorming activities. Completing a K- W - L (Know; Want to know; Learn) chart, for example, is recognized in the literature (Carr & Ogle, 1987) as a key strategy for gleaning insights into "where the learner is at" and where *they* would like to go next. Figure 2 illustrates a template for completing this task.
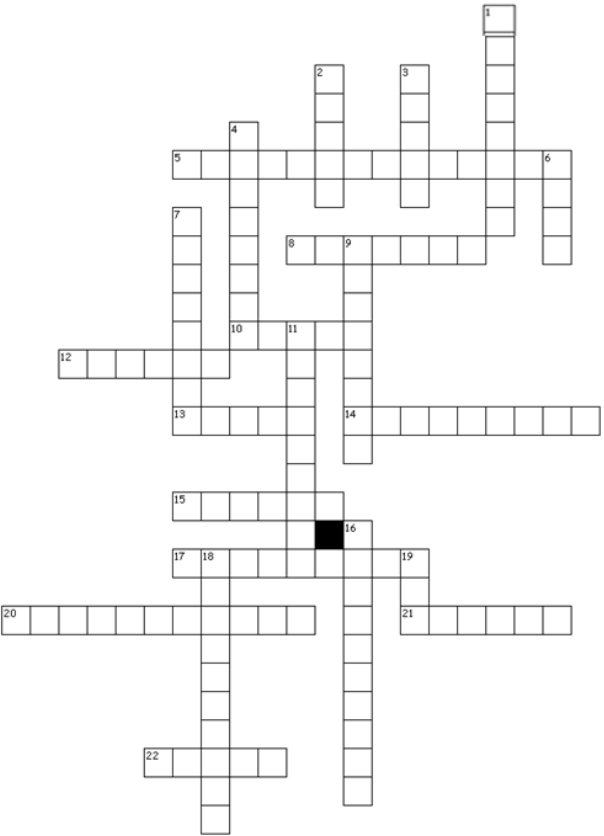
Know ….	Want to know …	Learn …

Figure 2: Task 1: K – W – L: What do you know, Want to know about police service dogs? (We'll complete the Learn column later)

Having ascertained that my Monday kids did not know any suitable names for working dogs, nor did they know very much about the work they do I proceeded to build background knowledge by presenting key vocabulary and concept information through the use of flash cards, pictures and direct explanations (Appendix 2). A crossword puzzle I prepared using online tools on Puzzlemaker (yet again, "old-old" LoTi) served to recycle these key words and concepts. I left the flashcards on the table in front of the children, knowing their control over the new words was still fragile and at best in their receptive repertoire. A push out task such as a crossword puzzle (Figure 3 below) provides support for transitioning to productive vocabulary knowledge, and again, engages children in meaningful and purposeful language learning. They enjoyed completing this task collaboratively.

> **Reflection 4:** Regardless of the context or thematic topic my B.Ed. students choose for preparing meaningful work for children in their (as yet, imagined) classrooms there are many transferrable, research-based learning strategies and scaffolds such as K-W-L and using visual representations (the photo in the newspaper clipping) that I can model for them from current work I am doing myself with my tutoring group. While my B.Ed. students chose topics such as "The Bunny Problem" and "Penguin Plunge," the sequence of linked tasks they need to prepare for their upcoming practicum work can loosely follow the model presented in Appendix 1. Their comments reflected the value of this model and their unfolding confidence to be prepared for their upcoming work with children.

Police dogs

Across

5. police dog
8. keep from harm
10. watch over
12. dog
13. faithful and true
14. drugs
15. wild and rough
17. can cause harm
20. smart
21. given for good work
22. to be done every day

Down

1. afraid of nothing
2. smell
3. age of retirement for police dog
4. following, looking for
6. something you must do
7. someone who breaks the law
9. follow all instructions
11. snow slide
16. brave
18. ready to attack
19. Search and Rescue

Figure 3: Task 2: Crossword puzzle created using www.puzzlemaker.com

My Monday kids decided that further information about police dogs (i.e. their "Want to know" column) could easily be gleaned on the World Wide Web. The trick would be to frame the question for a Google search and input this into the search engine. The task card below provides a scaffold, permitting successful completion of this work, and an audit trail to support recall and revisiting sites found useful at a later time on their own. Their first question, copied from their list of Want to know items in the K – W – L task was, "What are some names for police dogs?"

TASK CARD: Google search

Record your question for google: _____

_____.

Record the name of the website: _____

_____.

Record the url of the website: WWW: _____

Record the name of website 2: _____

_____

Record the url of the website: WWW: _____

Record the name of website 3: _____

_____.

Record the url of the website: WWW: _____

Figure 4: Task card for Google search

This query yielded several highly informative websites and the opportunity to discuss and begin to develop the critical thinking skills to evaluate their utility and credibility - skills that do not have to be delayed until university to instill (Jacobson & Mark, 2000). Various sites provided information about famous police service dogs and obedience training, for example. There is an abundance of YouTube clips available on these topics as well, allowing for listening practice.

Many learning tasks can be structured from these internet sites: note taking, summarizing, critiquing/evaluating the site for its credibility, keeping a vocabulary learning journal, listening and viewing short presentations, and synthesizing/transforming this information into a supported written effort of generating sentences structured into short paragraphs (Alberta Education, 2012). Locating sites with listening opportunities for enriched input is especially important for ELLs, given that few of them have exposure to sophisticated English vocabulary in their evening hours with their families.

Figure 5 below illustrates another task card, this one for the children to record their choices for boys' and girls' names for dogs and their meanings.

```
TASK CARD: Names for service dogs

NOTE: The name must start with an 'F', it must have no more than 9 letters, and no more than 2
syllables.

Boys' names:  _____    Meaning: _____

             _____    Meaning: _____

             _____    Meaning: _____

Girls' names: _____    Meaning: _____

             _____    Meaning: _____

             _____    Meaning: _____

Final choice:  Boy's name: _____

             Girl's name:  _____
```

Figure 5: Names for police service dogs

Finally, Figure 6 provides a template for the children to practice the format of completing information required for the Puppy Naming Contest. Such a template also provides printing practice for younger learners using an authentic task – something that will be familiar and welcomed by their parents (Li, 2006).

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TASK CARD: Practice filling out the postcard

My name: _____       TO:

                                  Name The Puppy Contest,
                                  Police Dog Service Training Centre,
                                  Box 6120, Innisfail, AB, T4G 1S8

Age: _____

Address: _____

         _____

         _____

Telephone number: _____

Puppy's name (girl): _____

Puppy's name (boy): _____
```

Figure 6: Task card for filling out a postcard

We created our own postcards from card stock, using the photo advertising the contest for the front and completing the required information on the backside. We duly sent our nomination for a name for one male puppy (Fortin) and one female (Frida) to Innisfail, watching anxiously in the weeks ahead on the RCMP website (http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/depot/news-nouvelles/20130416-name-the-puppy-nomme-le-chiot-eng.htm) to see whether either of our names might be selected (they were not).

> **Reflection 5:** My Monday kids found this a highly engaging, motivating topic and week-to-week took the initiative to read for more information and locate further good websites on their own. They kept their vocabulary journals current each week, eagerly sharing their new insights and understandings about working dogs. This independent work is necessary if ELLs are ever to close the vocabulary gap between themselves and their NS peers. Informal measures of their vocabulary growth using lexical profiling tools (www.lextutor.ca/vp/kids) reflected excellent gains over a 6-month period (Roessingh, 2012b).

This section has provided a model for how learning tasks can incorporate ICT into authentic, engaged learning. Task design included the need for multiple exposures and opportunities to hear, see, say and write target words. Sometimes tasks required some enabling activities, such as work with direct explanations and flash cards to automatize word recognition of new sight vocabulary.

Concluding Comments

This section returns to the three orienting questions:

1) What are the features of TBL that must be considered in the design of learning experiences for young ELLs that can enhance their language learning?

Perhaps the single most important feature is the *topic* chosen for embedding the tasks. For young learners, it is crucial that the topic aligns with their current interests and motivations, such as a contest (Dewey, 1897) that affords the potential for rich vocabulary input (tier 2 words). Tasks must be appropriately *scaffolded* with frameworks and visual information (Gibbons, 2003; Mohan 1989), and the gradual shift from receptive to productive uses of target vocabulary and concepts. Task sequencing, therefore, is another important feature. We also need to be cognizant of and sensitive to parents' expectations for their children's learning, including what they are asked to do at home (Li, 2006; Roessingh, 2006). Independent exploration of the topic, and follow-through tasks on the home computer must be well structured and reflect a clear sense of purpose.

2) How can ICT be integrated into TBL to transform the learning experiences for young ELLs?

The illustrative example provided here has shown myriad ways of ICT/TBL integration that engages children in motivating and meaningful language learning opportunities while supporting the acquisition of digital literacy concepts and skills in completing a web quest, for example.

From interesting websites, to accessing the daily newspaper, to YouTube clips, children have learned that there is a world of information available at their fingertips. Moreover, their comfort and confidence seemed to grow over the weeks and what seemed a challenge initially (e.g. typing in a google search term that would take them where they would find out more about working dogs) became rather second-nature (e.g. they routinely use the www to look for information ranging from why nails should be galvanized to how Calgary's Peace Bridge was designed and built). Gradually, they show a sense of agency in directing their own inquiry, even though for the most part the potential of technology is not yet fully realized, at least according to Prensky's framework (2013).

3) What types of learning experiences will help becoming teachers design meaningful tasks for their future students?

The answer to this last question evolves from my observations and reflections as the instructor of the university class, and draws on the students' written comments on the evaluation upon completion of the course. Pre-service teacher trainees need to develop proficiency in three domains of knowledge (Schulman, 1987): 1) content knowledge (i.e. the "what" or, curriculum, or, in Alberta, the Program of Studies); 2) pedagogical content knowledge (i.e. the "why" or, theoretical underpinnings of how learning occurs); 3) practical, pragmatic knowledge (i.e. the "how" or, applying theory to practice, into an instructional plan). Making these linkages requires learning supports, especially in domains (2) and (3): learning the "what" of the curriculum mandates (1) is more straightforward, especially since students in our B.Ed. program all have discipline knowledge from a previous degree to bring to their studies in teaching and pedagogy.

Planning for TBL/ICT must begin from a *principled* stance: an understanding of the underlying research in directing thinking surrounding task design (domain 2), including the uses of ICT. Thus, these students will need a small, well-chosen and accessible set of readings that provide the theoretical underpinnings to their work, and provide the link to the practical aspects of their planning (domain 3). Several students commented specifically on this point.

A *template* such as the one provided in Appendix 1 ensures that curricular mandates for the targeted elementary curriculum and ICT have been addressed within the context of the theme unit, while keeping in mind the ESL language proficiency benchmarks (Alberta Education, 2010). Several students were confident enough to plan for cross curricular integration, including tasks involving math and science problem solving. The template provides a quick snapshot of the overall plan.

A *model* of a thematically organized series of learning tasks is an important scaffold for pre-service teachers. They are easily able to adapt techniques such as K – W – L, flashcards, templates, and puzzles for example, into their own thematic development. Their insights into their work reflects a sense of self-efficacy and confidence as they head into their first practicum in local classrooms. Shifting to the day-to-day planning by way of individual lesson plans is an easy step to take, once there is momentum behind the "big picture" planning they have completed.

In sum, there are many elements that becoming teachers must apply and incorporate into their planning in order to successfully launch the trajectory from start to finish of a thematically developed topic. Task design that reflects a sense of pedagogical intent in addressing curriculum

content requirements and language learning needs, while strategically using ICT is a delicate, difficult and complex juggling act: modest beginnings and small steps forward are encouraged.

Postscript

Early in October 2013, a police service dog, Quanto, working for the Edmonton Police Service, was attacked and stabbed to death by a fleeing criminal suspect. Within minutes of the announcement, recorded on YouTube, social media were recording Tweets - short messages of condolences under the hashtag #RIPQuanto. This was followed by newspaper and TV coverage of the incident, letters to the editor and a movement to instigate "Quanto's law" through parliament, recognizing the killing of a police service dog as more than simply "cruelty to animals." My Monday kids were onto the story before I had even arrived for our weekly tutorials, having accessed the YouTube clip and proudly telling me they had led a class discussion at school. Preparing a Twitter message offering condolence forced the use of precise, succinct vocabulary; we prepared letters to the editor in support of Quanto's law. Next project? Perhaps we'll lobby the Canadian mint for a commemorative coin for police service dogs. Stay tuned!

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Appendix A: Thematic overview of Puppy Naming Contest

Thematic overview: Engage learners in a series of tasks that will enable them to submit a name to a Puppy Naming contest

Theme Title: Service dogs: More than just cute puppies   **Target Group:** Grades 3 – 5 Intermediate ELLs

Broad Goals: Develop academic vocabulary and skills through engaging tasks within the context of Service Dogs

Core Objectives			Material & Content	Lesson Name & Overview
Strategies	**Language**	**Concepts**	Websites	1.Intro to Puppy naming contest: online reading
Brainstorming/ webbing	**Vocabulary: fierce, aggressive, intelligent, obedient, courageous, loyal**	Attributes of working dogs	E.g. Calgary Herald: http://www.calgaryherald.com/life/Young+Canadians+urged+name+next+generation+police+dogs/7987000/story.html	2.What do you know about service dogs? K-W-L/ elaborative &collaborative talk
Pair work		From pet to work partner: Hard work!		3. Building BK: Attributes of service dogs (vocabulary flash cards/direct instruction & explanations)
Note taking		Digital literacy: newspaper online		4. Recycling vocabulary: Crossword puzzle using flash cards as a scaffold. Pair work
Identifying key vocabulary		Google: A good question	E.g. Dog Names Unleashed: http://www.dog-names-unleashed.com/policedognames.html	5. What's a good name for a service dog? Web search/task card
	Functions: describe, explain, summarize, make suggestions	A good website?		6. What do service dogs do? Note taking/task card
				7. Synthesizing information from notes/task card
		Curricular targets		8. Scaffolded writing task: Working dogs in the police service.
		Use keyboarding skills Work co-operatively in groups	Task cards Flash cards Teacher prepared crossword Sentence frames/template for paragraph writing	9. Training service dogs. Online listening task/task card
		Organize ideas and information into short paragraphs		10. Learning about famous service dogs. Web search
				11. What's in a name? Brainstorming, meanings of names, narrowing it down. 'Eintin' (boy) "Erida' (girl)
				12. Completing a post card/task card (practice)
				Final post card for the contest.

Learning Tasks and Enabling activities:	Assessment Strategies
Accessing and selecting websites: conducting a google search Recording sources of information/references Completing a crossword puzzle Making notes Identifying names of dogs and their meanings Completing a postcard/information required for the Puppy Naming Contest	Completion of task cards, scaffolded activities, crossword puzzle, accuracy in completing the postcard and preparing it for posting to the Dog Training Centre.

Appendix B: Key vocabulary and concepts for Puppy Naming

Key words to know: Make these words into flash cards and play a variety of "games" to promote both receptive and productive word knowledge focusing on *meaning*. e.g. 1) put the flash cards on the table and the teacher provides a definition of a word; child picks up the correct flash card. 2) leave the flash cards on the table and have the child complete the crossword puzzle. If working with several children or an entire class, allow pair work for this activity, and follow through with a discussion of how decisions were made for placing words into the grid. 3) reverse the roles from task/game #1: have the child provide a definition of a word, and others pick up the correct flash card. 4) put the flash cards on the table and have children work in pairs to use the words in sentences. 5) play a game of Scrabble. Extra points for using target words. 6) have the children write down 5 words that are key "personality characteristics" of a good service dog ('closed word sort').

Loyal	**fearless**	**courageous**
Fierce	**scent**	**track**
Aggressive	**criminal**	**narcotics**
Obedient	**SAR (Search And Rescue)**	
Intelligent	**Dangerous**	**canine**
Protect	**guard**	**reward**
Seven (age of retirement)		**German Shepherd**

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