

5. Authentic participation: integrating task-based and language-focus methodologies

Abstract

This is a method for engaging the students in real discursive communication while simultaneously focusing on accuracy. It is a basic duty of teachers, I think, to correct the students constantly, and thereby to provide added value to every class (even if the students are not paying!). This technique allows for both personalised meaningful interaction (task-based) and a strong culture of accuracy (language-focus). Surprisingly, students are enthusiastic about being interrupted so that they can say what they want to say more accurately. The dual role of the teacher, as both an equal participant and as a conversation-manager-and-language-explainer, is an essential skill for teachers to build.

Introduction

This is the second article in the triple-header with the previous article on ‘noticing’ and the next one on ‘good teaching’. In it, I want to explore the possibilities for a particular methodology – Authentic Participation – which utilises ‘noticing’ principles and which also combines the ideals of the task-based approach and the benefits of the language-focus approach.

In some ELT staff-rooms, task-based methodology has become almost an unquestioned belief, even an ideology. Just as other beliefs in the past also did (functions, information-gaps, negotiated syllabuses, lexis), it seems to have become the ‘way we do things around here’, a kind of cultural norm.

I don’t have any problem with task-based methodology at all, and indeed it is major part of my teaching. I do have a problem, however, with anything which starts to don a halo, or to push other members of the family out of the nest.

So the purpose of this article is to explore the origins of task-based thinking, and to re-locate this excellent approach in the pantheon of the other excellent possibilities that we can deploy in our classrooms.

The main enemy-target of task-based aficionados has always been PPP. Why? Because, if PPP is sufficiently caricatured, it can be made to look preposterous. But I think PPP – or ‘show, guide, allow’ – is the basis of all ‘apprenticeship-style’ training in all fields. As I said some years ago (Lowe 1998), the third ‘P’ is not, and never was, intended to be a pure ‘fluency’ phase, where the student was expected to ‘use’ the ‘target item’ in a completely free-speaking context. In this distorted scenario, if the students didn’t use it, the teacher had failed!

In actual fact, the third ‘P’ was always taught, in IH teacher training circles anyway (which are after all quite influential), as a ‘less-controlled practice’ phase. In other words, it is not ‘free’ speaking, unconfined, but ‘semi-controlled speaking’, where a sufficiently-wiley teacher has set up the role-play or discussion so that the target item will emerge quite easily. But, be in no doubt, the teacher, during the role-play, will need to nudge, and coax, and remind, and guide, and even write it on the board as a reference. This third ‘P’ is still an accuracy-based exercise, even though it has a strong fluency-based element!

The reason I defend PPP is because I feel it has been misrepresented, and that to lose it from the teacher’s canon would be a detriment. For the learner, it provides familiar hand-holding as they

journey into the language. If you don't believe this, learn a language, and discover how much repetition you have to do. As Blakeston (2002) says, only a teacher who learns a language in a classroom can truly appreciate what is entailed for their students. As a teaching technique, PPP engenders a number of very good habits in teachers, such as clever contextualisation, quick illustrations of meaning, concept checking, effective drilling, focus on pronunciation, effective boardwork, well-designed practice exercises, short relevant role-plays, etc, etc.

Notwithstanding my defence of PPP, however, I do also feel that PPP is *only one* of many approaches to 'showing' students a 'bit' of the language, and later in the article I will outline these methods. At this stage, however, I want to explore the notions of 'process' and 'product' and how they have affected thinking in the area of method.

Waves or particles? Product and process in learning, teaching, and language

In the early 20th century, physicists had to make sense of the fact that energy, such as light, was both wave *and* particle at the same time. In the same way, in the last 30 years, applied linguists have similarly had to make sense of the fact that language phenomena are both process and product at the same time. The question then becomes: which should we teach – the wave or the particle, the process or the product?

The 'product' view, as I already mentioned in my article on 'noticing', was the predominant view since the dawn of time. And all the teaching methods drawn up to make it ever-more-efficient reflected the basic assumption that language is 'bits'. We have to teach these bits either one at a time or in clumps, and the aim is that the student will gradually put these together to build a picture of how the language can work for them.

The 'process' view, on the other hand, has taken a quite different course. It seems to me that we can view it from three angles: learning, teaching, and language.

'Process' in learning terms has for 30 years been the focus of those who say that language is best 'acquired', or assimilated, in a bath of language immersion. The most successful of these proponents was Stephen Krashen in the mid 70s with his 'learning/acquisition' distinction (Krashen 1977). His strong position was that learning 'bits' of the language (whether these bits were rules or phrases or phonemes) would only develop the conscious 'monitor' of the brain, and the monitor would only enable the learner to reflect consciously about the language – in effect to correct themselves or say why something was wrong. The acquired language on the other hand 'grew' osmotically, as the learner was exposed to something called 'i + 1', which is input just above the current level of competence of the learner. The strong Krashen position was (i) that all language acquisition emerged simply from exposure, i.e. from listening (ii) that the two processes did not meet, that learning did not 'feed' acquisition.

In later incarnations of the learning/acquisition model, other commentators suggested (i) that listening was not sufficient, and that speaking was also essential, to activate the learner's linguistic thoughts (ii) that learning did indeed 'feed' the monitor, and the accepted position nowadays is that this is so (iii) that 'feedback' in the form of communicative success or failure was essential to a language learner's progress. The model most widely accepted by the early 90s, especially as it is now set in the classroom, as opposed to the immersion, context, became known as the 'Input-Output-Feedback' model. The assumption remains today, among many applied linguists, that some kind of unconscious acquisition process can, and some say should, be mobilised by teachers in the mind of

every classroom learner. And it is generally accepted that task-based methodology has its roots in this most recent version of learning/acquisition theory.

More recently, we have seen the development of another angle on the ‘process’ debate – the idea of consciousness-raising. In the mid 80s, William Rutherford (1987) suggested that we don’t actually *learn* ‘bits’ of language anyway, we become increasingly familiar with them over time and exposure. The more we attend to (ie. become more conscious of) those bits, the faster that familiarity process becomes. So he came at the problem from a different angle. Whereas Krashen was mainly interested in language *learning*, Rutherford was mainly interested in how his idea impacted on language *teaching*. He has been a fundamental influence for me because I think he hit upon a very noble truth – that learning is not something we can pin down. All learning is acquisition and all acquisition is learning. Learning is what happens when something has become part of us. In other words, we can only know when something has been learnt when we see that it is part of us. But we can never know at what point that magical event actually happened¹. Indeed it is not necessary for us teachers to know when it happens.

This fact, that it is not necessary to know, is immensely liberating. Because it frees us from the burden of having to account for every classroom action in terms of aims and effects. For years, we have been laboriously trained how to set clear aims, predict careful timings, anticipate problems, prepare solutions, keep lessons on track, and so on. But actually, if we don’t know at what point students learn something, it allows us to approach teaching in a different way.

It takes the pressure off our choice of methodology. Task-based? PPP? Test-teach-test? Grammar exercises? Direct method? Negotiation role-plays? *They all work*. Why? Because they all provide ways to *raise the noticeability* of aspects of language, they all provide ways to invite the student to notice things. Indeed they *only invite* the student to notice things. What the students actually notice will be up to their own internal syllabuses. Which in turn means that different students will notice different things. We can point, we can badger, we can show, we can allow. But *we can never make something be learnt by a student!!* In other words, students learn not what we teach, but what they learn. Our influence on this is, at best, hard to know, and at worst, probably marginal.

Finally, I want to talk about ‘process’ in the language itself. Batstone (1994), showed that an important aspect of all languages is that they have process. This manifests itself in the almost invisible undercurrent that holds together all the text, syntax, grammar, phrasing, and phonology/orthography that are the media of the language. He showed that language itself was both ‘particle’ and ‘wave’. Today, this view is brought to life in the methodology known as ‘grammaticisation’, first suggested by Michael Lewis (1997). For an example, see Article 3 – A Brief History of Language Teaching, p6. Thornbury (2001) explores this idea in some depth.

Approaches to language focus

In the previous article on ‘Noticing’ I outlined the assumptions underlying PPP. Hopefully I debunked the myth that PPP assumes that what is taught is what is learnt. Then I introduced the now-familiar idea of ‘noticing’ and suggested that it had a number of methodological implications.

¹ Even the ‘eureka’ event is only the culmination of a long deep process.

The key difference between the traditional view and the current one is that we no longer see language learning as being a process which the teacher largely controls – a process which goes . . . 'A + B + C = et voila!'. We now see learning as a cyclical, organic and invisible process, which the teacher can only marginally influence. As for the teacher, focusing on language can be heavy or light, it can be analytical or superficial, it can be pre-practice or while-practice or post-practice. So, whether we are introducing new language, or practising old language, or highlighting a fixed expression, or reminding students about a particular stress-pattern, or correcting a bit of grammar, we are helping the student to *focus on a point of language* or *notice that point of language*. For more detail on the following ideas, see Article 4 on 'noticing'

The techniques below all meet the objectives of language focus. But they are also qualitatively different. A language focus technique can be (i) **pre-focusing** (ii) **while-focusing** (iii) **post-focusing**. In the list below, 1 and 2 and 4 are post focusing, 3 and 7 and 8 and 9 are while-focusing, 6 is pre-focusing, and 5 can be *any* of these.²

1. *General reformulation after the activity (Output-feedback 1 - post-focusing)* . Here the teacher feeds back on student-to-student language work with individual written feedback sheets, or by a group-feedback error discussion, and focuses on whatever language points are appropriate.
2. *Intensive lexical reformulation after the activity (Output-feedback 2 - post-focusing)* . Here the teacher uses the progress of a carefully set-up student-to-student language activity, not to feedback on errors, but to feedback useful alternative expressions to the ones the students had used. Good for increasing 'phrase-power'.
3. *On-the-spot reformulation (Output-feedback 3 - while-focusing)* . Here the teacher simply points out error as it occurs, often just nudging the student to remember a grammar point from a previous lesson.
4. *Lexical exercises for collocation (gapfills, matching, discrimination, etc)*. Here, the teacher uses well-known practice techniques for language focus. For good textbook examples, see *Business Matters* (Powell 1996).
5. *Presentation of 'rules' (PPP – pre/while/post-focusing)* . Here the teacher stages the discussion of a grammar area and follows this with exercises and activities to practice the rule. Traditionally, it was used for pre-selected language items, part of the teacher's pre-planned syllabus. Nowadays, many teachers prefer for it to come after the teacher spots a general class weakness, and so is set up as remedial or clarifying. A variation of this is test-teach-test (*pre-focusing only*), where the teacher explores the students' ability with the rule before teaching it.
6. *Pre-teaching lexis (pre-focusing)* . Here the teacher pre-teaches pre-selected essential language items before a reading, listening, or discussion activity.
7. *Generating lexis via video (while-focusing)*. Here the teacher plays a video and draws useful lexis from it as it plays, stopping to recap as appropriate, and ensuring good boardwork and solid oral practice as appropriate.
8. *Referencing lexis via paper material (while-focusing)*. Here, the teacher has given the students a sheet containing lexical expressions around a theme, and the students refer to this sheet in the course of expressing their thoughts, asking the teacher for extra detail whenever what they need is not on the sheet. This is the base principle of Paul Emmerson's '*Business English Frameworks*' (Macmillan 2002). The technique is powerful with topic-based discussions, but is also very successful with communication skills practice such as chairing meetings, where the key functional phrases are laid out on a sheet for the students to refer to.

² Note Ellis's (2003) framework for task-based teaching, where he posits a similar division into pre, during and post task elements. However, Ellis is interested in the full range of factors bearing on these phases, not only on language focus.

9. *Generating lexis via discussion (aka 'authentic participation') (while-focusing)* – see the exploration of this approach below.

As you can see in Article 4 on 'noticing', all of these approaches are mediated via a communicative approach. Even PPP can nowadays be mediated via a kind of discussion with the students.

Number 9, however, does, I think, stand out from the rest, and it is the main theme of this article. Although at one level, 'Authentic Participation' is a variation on the familiar technique of 'discussion' for fluency practice, in my version, we use discussion not only as a means of activating *old* language items, but also as a medium for contextualising and focusing on *new* language items³. The 'Authentic Participation' idea is, I think, quite revolutionary in this respect because, as we shall see later, it is a means for engaging students in real discursive communication while at the same time focusing on accuracy.

Task-based methodology

Task-based teaching, though it was in a very different form back then, first emerged from some experiments done in India in the late 70s, when N.S. Prabhu got his non-native secondary school pupils to do a geography task by obliging them to ask him everything in English, and getting all the answers in English. In other words, they were focused on geography, but they were incidentally engaging in English as the medium to complete the task. This idea, of incidental, almost unconscious, language use, was very appealing to a liberal-minded teaching profession, because it offered the ideologically-attractive principle of a teacher who was not an authority figure but an 'equal in a group endeavour' – a consultant.

Since that time, Willis (1997) and Skehan (1998), among others, have defined and refined both the underlying principles and the teaching procedures pertaining to task-based approaches, and these have gained a solid foothold in the range of tools we have. And Peter Moor and Sarah Cunningham have turned these ideas into an impressive and effective range of textbook materials in *Cutting Edge* (Moor and Cunningham 1998).

In task-based methodology, the students engage in a task, in groups – say to plan a week-end of events for a visiting relative. As they talk, they have access (on a sheet, or by asking the teacher ad-hoc) to expressions which they will find useful in discussing, arguing, and concluding their deliberations, and in useful topic-related lexis. They utilise the expressions, with help from the teacher on pronunciation, and where useful, they can be tape-recorded for feedback later. It is very useful for functional practice (e.g. discussions language), and also for topic-based lexical exploration (e.g. tourist attraction lexis). This set-up can seem very daunting for inexperienced teachers, because it seems that little can be really planned – they just have to wait to see what the students ask them and respond accordingly, which forces them to know a lot and to be very quick-thinking.

The '*Cutting Edge*' Series has cracked this problem to some extent, by devising tasks in each unit which are fabricated, yes, but which are sufficiently engaging to seem real, and more importantly are sufficiently thematic to allow a small range of predictable structures and lexis to be grouped together in a text-box on the page. In other words, the language the students are likely to need to fulfil the task is there on the page, so that much of the teacher's job is made easy.

³ I define 'language focus' as any event in the classroom where attention is brought to a language phenomenon, which includes feedback and response to student queries, as well as teacher-led focussing. I define 'activation' as either (i) any event in which the students are speaking communicatively with high expectation of and guidance with accuracy, or (ii) any event where the students are speaking communicatively but freely to build confidence.

The basic assumption of task-based teaching is that the students will assimilate (acquire?) language unconsciously because it is being used as it is genuinely needed. The assumption, in other words, harks back to the idea of acquisition, through comprehensible input, coming out of real communication, and being tempered by appropriate feedback.

The theory is attractive, and I sympathise with the many thousands of teachers who have taken it up with enthusiasm. The drawbacks of task-based teaching, however, are these. Firstly, it is certainly not a panacea, and it can be applied too often and too unthinkingly. What is important is not ideology, but practicality i.e. providing what the students need. And, so often I see teachers pushing onwards with an approach which the students are not comfortable with. Just for instance, take the issue of the students' idea of the role of the teacher. We train teachers to train their students to accept that they themselves are responsible for their learning, not the teacher. So far so good. But we can not assume that students will then extrapolate from this that their colleague-students will be their teachers. And the danger with many task-based activities is when the students perceive that there is too much reliance on group-work (i.e students talking to students) and not enough participation or intervention by the teacher.

Another dangerous by-product of task-based ideology is that teachers start to feel that accuracy, that correction and accuracy-based feedback, are not appropriate. And the result is that they don't correct the students enough, the students become disgruntled, and the students make slower progress.

In my experience of talking to students about this, if the teacher stays back too much, many students feel they are not getting enough feedback on their individual accuracy. If, on the other hand, the teacher *participates*, as an equal in the group activity, the students can feel that they are getting *both* another group member, *and* closer and more constant feedback from the teacher, who is alert to them as individuals and giving them constant little nudges, reminders, and explanations. This role is partly addressed by the act of 'monitoring', and in very large classes, of say 20, this may be the only route. But for classes of 12 or so, the teacher-as-participant idea, I would argue, is a better role in student learning terms than mere monitor.

Authentic participation – methodological principles

I decided to write this article because Authentic Participation is an approach I have become very attached to over the years. It does incorporate the best tenets of both the language-focus (or 'stop-and-look') approach, and the task-based (or 'seamless-learning') approach. And I think it is a considered response to the ideological antipathy to PPP. Indeed, among the many language-focus techniques, it occasionally uses a quick PPP to get a point across.

But it is not only the occasional PPP that is a little risqué. With Authentic Participation, you are going to break a few more of the hallowed and traditional rules of 'good teaching'.

For instance, the first thing that happens in all my courses is that I tell the students they will be working hard during my lessons, and that I will expect them to be as accurate as they can be all the time. I also tell them that my job is to make sure they leave the course with a sense of having learnt a lot and of becoming much more accurate, so my job will be to correct them as much as I need to. *We create a sort of accuracy culture, in which my expectations of the students are high.* I always get a very positive response to this promise, and their engagement is much enhanced. And since I know that most of the lesson-time will be spent on communicative activity, I know I will be killing two

birds with one stone – promoting real communication (to promote their fluency) and giving constant corrective feedback (to build accuracy).

Secondly, I talk a lot. I make teacher-talking-time worthwhile (Lowe 1984). When teachers use carefully-tuned talking as a medium to introduce new language, it is actually very communicative. I think the key thing is to tape yourself as you do it so that you can play back the tape as the language model. In the mid 90s, very similar findings were made (Banton 1996) and further methodological suggestions were developed. Thornbury (2001) also explores this theme in his chapter on ‘Process teaching’. The fact is, if we teachers talk carefully and genuinely, we can dramatically enhance the language which the students are exposed to. We can cleverly include lexis and grammar from previous lessons. We can fine-tune our language so that it is sometimes within and sometimes a little beyond what the students are familiar with. The point is, it is always genuine, it is always communicative, and it is always rich.

Thirdly, I break a key ‘rule’ from past teacher-training courses. I speak slowly and deliberately (varying this depending on the level), articulating clearly, not using contractions, and hardly ever speaking at natural native-speaker speed. I always maintain absolutely natural intonation and rhythm, and I use the usual principles of grading and simplifying just above the students’ productive level – a technique I learnt on my IH teacher-training course in 1974, and a principle which Krashen claimed as his own all through the 1980s.

So getting back to Authentic Participation – how does it work?

Well, in this approach, particularly useful for bringing out large amounts of topic-related lexis, the teacher starts a discussion (e.g. Tell me about your morning routines), and the students, *either* starting off in small groups *or* working as a whole class, attempt to answer the question. As they discuss around the issue, with the teacher participating naturally, most of the key lexis needed to talk about, in this case, the lexis of morning routines, comes up and can be put on the board. The key to success is that the teacher is an equal member of the group, and talks and opines and argues and *reacts just as if he was in a real conversation*. Most things are written on the board as you go along. Very simple. Very efficient. Very level-sensitive, as the students’ level will be the level at which they, or the teacher, will be suggesting words and phrases. Corrective feedback⁴ (nudging, reminding, clarifying, referring back to past lessons, asking colleagues to help, etc) goes on constantly but unobtrusively. And whatever lexis or mini-grammar they don’t know and is useful at their level, you can provide! (NB When you write up the expressions, always mark word and phrase *rhythm*, as little boxes over the right syllables!). The atmosphere is one of the students trying to accurately express their real thoughts and feelings. The constant nudge from the teacher is: ‘Say that again in good English’. This does *not* have the effect of ‘criticism’, or of damaging the students’ self-esteem, as some commentators argue. In fact it is the reverse! Because everyone in the classroom respects each other, the students’ reaction is to smile as if to say, ‘I’m glad you are pushing me, because I want to say this right’.

Philosophy and aims

- Minimum preparation
- The idea is for the teacher to be both an authentic participant in a conversation and an acute and alert monitor of the students’ participation in it

⁴ Remember that ‘corrective feedback’ is a form of language focus.

- The purposes are
 - (i) language focus out of genuine communication i.e. to use the genuine communicative context of the conversation to teach new things and to help the students really feel this benefit
 - (ii) improved accuracy in a fluency context i.e. to use the opportunity of the authentic conversation to help the students become more accurate in their language use by setting up an ‘accuracy culture’ within a respectful relationship
 - (iii) high-dose communicative listening practice from the relatively high teacher-talking-time
 - (iv) to have the students interacting genuinely with each other as well as with the teacher.

Role of teacher

- Creates the classroom atmosphere in which this kind of activity is valued
- Sets off the discussion/conversation (e.g. students have read the morning’s English language newspaper, and there’s a nice story in it worth discussing). (Be sure that you guide the discussion into areas of personal interest for the students e.g. for most students, the topic of unemployment is boring, but the topics of the best way to cook pasta, or the horrors and delights of bungee-jumping, or the best way to keep fit – these topics are more engaging. I usually take my lead from them).
- Reacts as real person to what is said by the other speakers, and participates as a real person would
- Keeps alert to how/where the conversation is going and steers it as appropriate
- Keeps alert to the quiet students and brings them in
- Is an acute and alert monitor of the students’ participation in the conversation
- Feeds back smoothly and unobtrusively as students make mistakes, i.e. judges when not to feedback at all, when to feedback lightly (e.g. with a nudge/reminder), when to feedback decisively (e.g. with a correction / colleague’s help), and when to feedback comprehensively (e.g. with (i) quick PPP, or (ii) phrases, marked with stress, written on the board for rhythmically accurate pronunciation).⁵
- After any corrective feedback, is sure to have students immediately recap what they had intended to say, this time correctly.

Role of student

- Should feel free to start the discussion themselves
- Participates as a real person in the conversation
- Stays relaxed, and realises that their accuracy is being enhanced by this apparently unfocused method because it periodically switches to focused attention, where the students are invited to notice something

Students have often said to me that they don’t like lessons in which they feel at the end ‘Well, what have I learnt?’ They criticise lessons in which there has been a lot of talking but very little correction. They seem to set great store by having a teacher who really gives them a sense of progress in every lesson. They say that it is crucial for the teacher to take the role of being a source of information, a reference point, a feedback ‘knower’, and a guide. They say that when they are working on their own or with colleagues for long periods of the lesson, they feel they are getting very limited value. On the other hand, if the teacher is participating along with the students in an all-in

⁵ See Article 9: A new model of communicative intonation and rhythm

activity, and is also taking the view that improved accuracy is a useful aim for all their students, they feel this is more credible, and that their accuracy measurably improves over just a few days. Students like to feel they have moved forward every day.

I have heard a counter-argument to the teacher-as-participant principle, which runs as follows. When the teacher is not involved, i.e. when the teacher ‘gets out of the way’, as is suggested in much of the literature on the task-based approach, the students’ interaction is different. They don’t defer to the teacher, they take on a better independence, they get much more stuck in and stop looking over to see if the teacher is saying something they might miss. I think these dangers do exist. And in a very large class, students have to work in groups on their own, with the teacher as occasional monitor and helper, and a full class discussion with everyone involved, at least on the Authentic Participation model, is unrealistic. In this scenario, if the teacher was to get involved with one group, for instance, there could be disruption as the other groups crane to hear what the teacher is helping with or what he is writing on the board.

But my counter-counter-argument is this. In my model, the teacher ceases to be ‘teacher-like’. They adopt a role which is nearer to that of colleague. So even the idea of deferring is very unlikely, because the teacher has indicated that they are ‘alongside’ metaphorically, rather than ‘at the front’. I can only say that while for some classes this problem could be an issue, for mine it is not.

Authentic participation – a lesson-transcript

Now, let’s look at some extracts from a lesson-transcript.

Background:

Charles: teacher (English). *Gabriel:* client relations manager for a large bank (Mexican). *Marina:* an olive oil sales manager for a small family firm (Italian). *Taki:* a chemicals engineer working on biodegradable plastics (Japanese). Note: We are nearly at the end of a ten-day intensive course. The level is lower intermediate. The class is a business English class, but today’s first topic is a general English story arising out of the ‘Metro’ newspaper. ‘Fransiska’ (mentioned here and there) is the Centre Administrator. The atmosphere of the lesson is good-humoured, quiet, low-key, and seated. Gabriel is the most talkative, and Taki the most accurate. Marina, even after two weeks, is a little shy, especially of the tape. Taki arrives late.

Aim of the lesson:

In this first 45 minutes of a three-hour class, my aim was to allow the conversation to emerge in any way it wanted to go, to be alert to any opportunity for correcting, clarifying, showing, or practicing.

Aspects to note:

- Almost all of the language-focus is ‘while-focusing’, but the listening elements, when the teacher talks at length, are pure ‘language as process’, or ‘comprehensible input’.
- Focusing techniques used are: nudging, teaching (PPP), reminding, writing on board and pointing to stress and rhythm markers, repetition practice, referring to boardwork to remind, etc
- The task-based element is the way the conversation takes on a life of its own, the way the students check their language use with the teacher, and the way that the students have equality in initiating the story and moving on to the other issues.
- It is not a perfect example of the technique, because there are only three students, and one of them is shy. But it shows what can be achieved with an intermediate level General English topic, and I have regularly used this technique to teach larger classes in the past.

- The topics are: the story of a man who led a double life, what to do if you have a lot of money, the problems of children who don't understand money, how to contribute to society, how to have integrity.

Extract 1

G: I bought the Marina's books yesterday.
C: You did.
G: And other the . . .
C: And . . .? . . . also.
G: And also I buy business dictionary.
C: I also bought . . .
G: I also bought . . . (*teacher waits and coaxes*). . . a business dictionary
C: Say it again.
G: I also bought a business dictionary.
C: Good. Again.
G: I also bought a business dictionary.
C: So in fact you bought a business vocabulary exercise book, a business dictionary, and . .

Notes for Extract 1: Students talking about real things from yesterday; repeating corrected error: teacher engages partly as feedback and partly as real participant.

Extract 2

G: I read a very funny article.
C: Oh right. Tell us about the article.
G: One guy he work . . .
C: Think about your English.
G: OK. One guy he worked for a company, and I think he was in the financial area
C: Financial field.
G: Field. Financial field. Is better 'field' than 'area'?
C: Yes.
G: He worked in the financial field. And he rob one million and half [sic] pounds.
C: (*chuckles, because same mistake yesterday*) He rob?
G: Stole. He stoled. Stole?
C: Present? Steal.
G: He stole one million and half . . .
C: One million and half?
G: One and a half million pounds, and he's four years old . . .
C: He's four years old?
G: Forty.
C: Ah.
G: He's forty years old, and he has double life – life steel
C: Lifestyle.
G: Lifestyle. One with her wife . . .
C: With . . .?
G: His wife in a middle class, and another for a playboy with travels to the Carribean . . .
C: Trips.
G: Trips.
C: Oh hi Taki.
T: Hallo sorry I'm late.
C: That's OK. Gabriel is just telling us about a story he read in the newspaper. Carry on Gabriel.
G: With beautiful womans, pay for the company of these womans, travels in private jets . . .
C: So high class escorts . . .
G: Yes. And he spends maybe one million of pounds . . .
C: . . of pounds?

- G: One million pounds, before the police catch him.
 C: Past tense?
 G: Caught him. But is funny the article, because when the police caught him, he said OK - it's OK – I don't . . . repentir
 C: I don't regret . . .
 G: I don't regret anything.

Notes for Extract 2: student initiates the topic; teacher engages; teacher nudges and reminds; teacher clarifies when requested; student tells the story both fluently and (with help) largely accurately.

Extract 3

- C: Does he have any children?
 G: No, in the article don't say.
 C: Because, normally, when men . . .
 G: When do you say 'say' and when do you say 'tell'?
 C: Good question. . . . Marina?
 M: Hmm
 C: Very simple. Extremely simple, actually. No?
 Well first of all (*writes on board*) you 'say' to a person, and you say words. Words. He said he was ill. The words were "I am ill".
 G: Yes, earlier, Marina said 'Maurice say me', and you said no 'say' . . . 'told'
 C: OK – 'say to me', is fine . . . 'say me' is not fine. So this is the grammar of the word. And the second thing is you say words. (*continuing to write on board*) But 'tell' is not with 'to'. So write 'to', and cross it out.
 And we 'tell' . . . a story . . . a fact . . . an instruction . . . the truth . . . a lie. (*teacher writes all these*). And that's it. Very simple, see. You'll never make a mistake. . . .
 You know this don't you Taki.
 T: I know, but I make a mistake.
 C: Yes OK, but as long as you know the rule, you can check back to it when you need it.
 Can you see that, Marina. So, now Maurice told you . . . what did he tell you?
 M: He told me my certificate wasn't signed.
 C: Right. He told you a fact. But . . . could you say 'He said me?' . . . No. . . . 'Me' – let's cross it out on the board here . . . (*teacher crosses out 'me'*) . . . 'He said the certificate isn't signed'.
 Or . . . 'He told me the certificate isn't signed'.
 So does that answer your question Gabriel?
 G: Yes.
 C: Right. So you were talking about this man. He said . . . or he told the police . . .
 G: He said 'I have really had a fantastic time'.
 C: And was he happy to go to prison?
 G: He was prepared for going to jail.
 C: Uh huh. Really. Fair enough. And his wife? I wonder what she said.
 G: (*chuckles*)
 C: Not too happy . . .

Notes for Extract 3: teacher does a spontaneous PPP on 'say' and 'tell' in *response* to a student query and this provides a valuable reference point for errors later on; teacher does the PPP via discussion, with concept questions, careful boardwork, and practice; discussion comes back to the theme and continues on.

Extract 4

- M: Yes, but is a poor life.
C: Well spiritually it's a poor life . . . it's pure materialism . . . hedonism. Gabriel? Do you envy him?
G: Envy? What is this?
C: Envy. Envy means 'feel that you want to do what he did'.
G: No no no . . . I understand perfectly my relationship with money
C: What is your relationship with money?
G: With respect. When I was high school guy . . . ?
C: When you were at high-school, yes . . .
G: And I like working for finance since I was a child.
C: You like . . . no not 'like'. 'Querer' is not normally 'like'. 'Querer' is . . . ?
G: Want. I wanted to work in a financial field.
C: In the . . .
G: The financial field . . . since I was a child. And one experienced person, maybe sixty years old, teacher in the high-school, said me . . .
C: Hm hm hm!
G: Told me . . . (C: Or?) or said . . . "all the most beautiful thing in this life is all the morning when you shave, you can see you in the mirror . . ."
C: Look at yourself in the mirror . . .
G: . . . "Look at yourself and you can say yourself . . . you can say: this is an honest person"
C: 'Mirar' is 'to look at'
G: Look at . . .
C: Do you agree with that, Marina?
M: Yes.
C: So, honesty, integrity . . . are the most important things. Do you agree Taki?

Notes for Extract 4: conversation is continuing as normal; opportunity to refer Gabriel back to 'say' and 'tell' earlier in the lesson; all teacher intervention is as unobtrusive as possible.

Extract 5

- C: And Marina. How do you feel about money. You respect it don't you.
M: Yes. It isn't good to have a lot of money, because there are some friends of mine, as Gabriel said, that their parents have a lot of money, and they don't understand money . . .
C: They don't understand where it comes from.
M: Yes. They aren't their money.
C: Yes, they didn't earn it. 'It isn't', not 'they aren't' . . . their money.
M: It isn't their money. And they can't understand. Because, they don't work, they don't study, they go to university but . . .
C: But how do they get the degree after ten years if they don't study?
M: Yes, they stay ten years to do the degree . . .
C: Their parents allow that. (M: Yes)

Notes for Extract 5: Marina gets involved in the discussion, showing that she is thoughtful about her accuracy; she remembers 'say' and uses it correctly.

Extract 6

- T: I think it's good to have a lot of money, because I might do more things to society, I might provide more things if I got a lot of money.
C: What kind of things? I mean you would be charitable? you would give your money away?
T: And, we know a lot of way to provide something for society, for example, I work for my company, and if I became a president . . .
C: the president . . . there's only one . . .

T: . . the president of my company, I could hire a lot of people . . I could provide something .

C: Yes, you could contribute something . . . a very good word this, ‘contribute’ (*writes it on board*) – to contribute something to society, the stress is ‘trib’. And the preposition is not ‘for’, it is ‘to’. So ‘provide for’ and ‘contribute to’. So what you’re saying then Taki is that if you were the president of your company you could employ more people and those people would have jobs and they would therefore be happy because they had jobs.

T: Yes, that’s right.

C: But, as a businessman, you couldn’t employ those people if it was not profitable, because you couldn’t put the company out of business, the shareholders would not allow it. So it’s very limited what you can do when you are the president of a company.

T: Hmm. First of all, the top of my company’s rule is to contribute to society . . .

C: To con . .

T: To contribute to society . . . by profit . .

C: By making a profit, yes . . I mean I would agree with that. I think you contribute a lot by making profits . . .As long as – remember ‘as long as’ – what is ‘as long as’? –

G: As well as? .

C: No. It’s this excellent phrase, which we use a lot. It means ‘only if’ (*writes the phrase on the board*). So if you make a large profit, you can contribute to society, as long as your shareholders don’t want a lot of that profit .

T: No no no. Stakeholders are not only shareholders.

C: That’s true. But stakeholders have no power.

T: No, they don’t have the power . . the financial power . . . but stakeholders can make influence to the company policy, they can make influence to the president . . .

C: Yes, fair enough. Do you think that’s right, Marina, Gabriel. . .?

Notes for Extract 6: Taki now gets involved; his accuracy and his fluency both show quite well here; reminder (we had covered it last week) about ‘the’ (one of its meanings = only one); boardwork on phrase stress (‘to contribute to society) to provide visual reference point for self-correction from then on; teacher talking = listening practice for all; quick teach of ‘contribute’, ‘as long as’; and so on.

Some practical suggestions

1. Oral newspaper summaries: Give the students homework, in which they choose an article from an English Language newspaper to summarise in preparation for an oral summary presentation the next morning. If there are 12 in the class, have them do this in groups of four at a time. Summaries are excellent, because the students (i) choose their own article (ii) practise reading (iii) practice and recycle new lexis (iv) experience authentic language (v) practise summarising. Each oral summary should be about two minutes long. At the end, invite the other students to ask questions and give opinions. The teacher is a natural participant in the discussion, and adds language clarifications, lexis, pronunciation checks, grammar reminders, real opinions, etc, as they go along. In other words, they focus on accuracy in the midst of fluency.

2. First day questions: Have the students talk to each other for several minutes, and try to find ‘three things in common’. At this stage the students are in their own groups, and the teacher is sitting behind them and monitoring each group collecting mistakes for later feedback. At the end of the groupwork, the teacher then invites the students to ask questions of him/her. The rubric is this: ‘I will answer every question you ask about me, but I will not answer it unless your question is *grammatically perfect!*’ Once again, focus on accuracy in the midst of fluency.

Conclusion

To make this technique work well is not rocket science. You just need to be alert, willing to engage rather than control, and able to think on your feet about when to correct and when not, when to nudge and when to go in deeper. I have been amazed at the results. They don't show overnight, but after several days, they show. The students have more confidence, their pronunciation is significantly improved, and they *feel* that they have become more accurate. I would not claim that Authentic Participation is anything more than just another technique you can try. But I would claim that everyone should now be thinking of integrating language-focus methodology with task-based methodology in as many ways as they can.

References

- Banton A (1996) 'Live Listening for Beginners' in *IH Journal 1*
Batstone R (1994) *Grammar* OUP
Blakeston R (2002) 'Language Teachers should Learn Languages' in *IH Journal 12*
Ellis R (2003) *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching* OUP
Krashen SD (1977) 'The Monitor Model for Second Language Performance' in Burt, Dulay, and Finnochiaro (eds) *Viewpoints on English as Second Language* New York Regents
Lewis M (1997) *Implementing the Lexical Approach* Macmillan Heinemann
Lowe CT (1984) 'Making Teacher-Talking-Time Worthwhile' in *Modern English Teacher 3/84*
Lowe CT (1998) 'Sorry, It Won't Do' in *BESIG IATEFL Newsletter*
Moor P and Cunningham S (1998-2004) *Cutting Edge Series* Longman
Powell M (1996) *Business Matters* LTP / Thomson Heinle
Rutherford W (1987) *Second Language Grammar: Learning and Teaching* Longman
Skehan P (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* OUP
Thornbury S (2001) *Uncovering Grammar* Macmillan Heinemann
Willis J (1996) *A Framework for Task-Based Learning* Longman