

Researching the implementation of TBLT in the classroom

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Pedagogical Realities of Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching

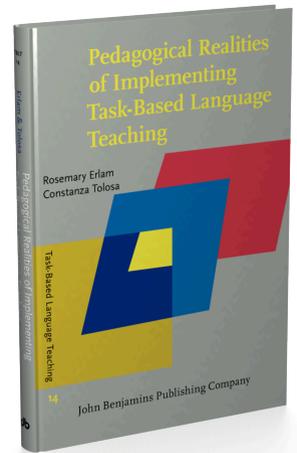
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Introduction

Over the past 20 years, Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has attracted much attention (e.g., Cook, 2010; East, 2012; Van den Branden, 2006). There is now an impressive literature dealing with a range of TBLT issues and numerous studies investigating the impact of TBLT, uptake of TBLT, and learner response to TBLT, among others (e.g., Bygate, 2015; Ellis et al., 2020; Samuda et al., 2018; Van den Branden et al., 2009). At the same time, there is a documented imbalance in the TBLT literature. Much of what is written about TBLT is informed by the world of research rather than by the real world of practice (Bygate, 2020; Van den Branden et al., 2009). There is a need for TBLT to deal with the issues and concerns that are relevant to stakeholders (e.g., teacher educators, curriculum designers, teachers, learners) if this disconnect between theory and practice is to be bridged. This book explores how tasks and TBLT are understood, and used as pedagogical tools, in classrooms by New Zealand teachers. We claim that the New Zealand context is one which is typical of other teaching and learning contexts where TBLT may be introduced. As we explore how TBLT has been implemented in our specific context, we focus on two main questions.

We first ask *how teachers learn about and understand tasks and TBLT* after completing an in-service education programme where they are introduced to second language acquisition (SLA) theory and TBLT. This programme, Teacher Professional Development Languages (TPDL), provides the context for the research informing this book. In Part 1, the main focus is on how a group of teachers, participating in TPDL, learn about, understand, and position tasks and TBLT as relevant and of value to their specific teaching contexts. This section also presents data on whether a small subset of this group of teachers use tasks in their practice the year following participation in TPDL, and, if so, how they use them. Our analysis of data from Part 1 introduces some of the pedagogical realities of implementing an innovation like TBLT in school contexts.

The second main research focus of the book is *whether and how teachers implement TBLT and use tasks as pedagogical tools* within their teaching contexts. Part 2

of the study investigates the extent to which another group of teachers is able to implement TBLT after some time (on average 4 years) has elapsed following on from their learning about tasks and TBLT in the TPDL programme. In Part 2, we first look at whether these teachers use tasks and embody TBLT in their practice and, if so, how they create opportunities for learning. Part 2 extends on the investigation conducted in Part 1 by exploring the pedagogical realities that teachers, who use tasks in their practice, face. It also investigates teachers' understanding of tasks and TBLT and the benefits they see for incorporating them into their practice. The fact that this part of the research focuses on a participant group who are at some distance from their professional learning allows for some investigation of the sustainability of tasks and TBLT, and of those factors which facilitate or constrain the implementation of this pedagogical approach.

Samuda et al. (2018) conclude, from their experience in working with, and observing, teachers who use tasks, that the challenges involved in putting TBLT principles into practice in the classroom are greater than the literature tends to acknowledge. They call for bottom-up approaches to research where the pedagogical realities of implementing TBLT are worthy of investigation. This book aims to address this gap. We write from the premise that any innovation is likely to require adaptation and that it is important that TBLT research engages with the real world and with the practices, demands, and perspectives of teachers as they implement and/or adapt TBLT to meet the characteristics and needs of students in their different instructional contexts (Ellis et al., 2020).

An under-researched context

As mentioned, TBLT literature is heavily weighted by the world of research. However, this research tends to be informed, as Bygate (2020) claims, by the priorities of the academy, rather than by the needs of language teachers and learners. Evidence of this is the fact that many studies have been conducted in laboratory, rather than classroom, contexts. Furthermore, a significant proportion of classroom-based research has involved experimental manipulation. Many of the studies in the recent special issues of *Language Teaching Research* (2016) and *TESOL Quarterly* (2017), which are designated especially as contributions to TBLT research, fit within this category. In the current book, there is no attempt on the part of the researchers to manipulate the settings in which data are collected. The aim is to investigate how tasks and TBLT are used *naturally*, that is, in intact, regular classes (Bygate, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge, nonetheless, that there is a TBLT literature that is informed by the classroom context and that investigates how tasks are used naturally. However, this literature has tended to be representative of a narrow range

of instructional contexts. It has tended to focus on the teaching and learning of English rather than of other modern languages (Klapper, 2003). It has mostly involved the adult language learner rather than the younger learner (Carless, 2012), and most often represented the tertiary context. It has also tended to focus on the post-beginner, rather than the beginner language learner (Bygate, 2020).

This project aims to present pedagogically informed and relevant research from contexts which we outline below, some of which, we have claimed, are underrepresented in literature to date.

- the foreign language learning context

In the foreign language learning context, learners typically have no, or limited exposure to, or contact with, the target language outside of the classroom. This means, of course, that their language learning is largely limited to, and constrained by, the opportunities that are provided for them in the classroom. This learning context has been described as one that is *acquisition-poor* (Long, 1983). In the New Zealand foreign language classroom, exposure to the target language is even further restricted by the time allocated in the school timetable to language classes, which is typically more limited than that in other language learning contexts. Classes may be scheduled to allow from between 1 to 4 hours of instruction per week. More information about the New Zealand language learning context will be presented in a later section of this chapter.

While there is an emphasis in TBLT literature on the foreign language learning context (e.g. see Bryfonski & McKay, 2019), the contexts listed below feature less commonly.

- the teaching and learning of languages other than English

In this study the focus is on the teaching of foreign languages other than English and te reo Māori (the indigenous language of New Zealand). The most commonly taught foreign languages in New Zealand schools, and the ones that feature prominently in our study, are: Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish. Also taught are German, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori and Tokelauan.

- school-aged learners in a range of New Zealand educational contexts

The learners in this project were younger language learners than those that tend to be the focus of much TBLT research. They represented both primary (Years 1 to 8, approximate ages 5 to 12) and secondary (Years 9 to 13, approximate ages 13 to 17) levels. The schools that they attended represented a range of educational contexts (e.g., single sex or co-educational, significant proportion of students from other cultural and language backgrounds) and a varied socioeconomic demographic. Most schools were state-funded, though a minority were private or of special character (i.e., implementing a programme reflecting a specific faith or educational philosophy).

- the beginner language learner

Another important characteristic of this study, which differentiates it from much of the existing TBLT literature, is that the learners were mostly beginner learners with limited proficiency in the language they were learning. This was because most of them had been learning the language for between only 1 and 3 years in, as described above, an acquisition-poor context where the number of language lessons they received on a weekly basis was limited.

The teachers who taught in these contexts were from widely different backgrounds. Some had extensive experience teaching languages, others had very little, or, at the time of their participation in the TPDL programme, none. The level of proficiency that they had in the language that they were teaching also varied significantly. Some were L1 speakers, that is, spoke the language as their first language; others were beginner language learners. Lastly, teachers varied considerably in the knowledge that they had about TBLT prior to their enrolment in the TPDL programme. Some had never heard of it, others had attended TBLT workshops or, even, in one case, a TBLT conference.

While the pedagogical contexts that we describe above are less typical of much of the published TBLT research, they are not, we claim, uncommon. For many language learners, their first experience of language learning is at school, in a context where the target language is not the standard medium of communication and where the main, or only, exposure to it is within the classroom. In this book we are interested in investigating to what extent these contextual factors might facilitate or constrain teachers in implementing TBLT. We hope to thus contribute to a greater understanding of TBLT, and of the task as a pedagogical tool, and so to highlight convergences and divergences between theory and practice.

Why TBLT?

Strong arguments have been made for including tasks and TBLT (e.g., Long, 2015) as central to any language programme. It is not the purview of this book to present a detailed justification for TBLT; however, a summary of key theoretical and pedagogical reasons for TBLT will be presented.

The theoretical rationale for TBLT

TBLT accords well with theories of SLA and with what is known about the processes of language learning. Furthermore, the major theoretical traditions which seek to explain second language acquisition, the *cognitive-interactionist* and *sociocultural*, are each able to find a rationale to support the implementation of TBLT. Arguments that support TBLT in relation to these theoretical traditions are summarised below.

From a cognitive-interactionist perspective

Cognitive theories of learning emphasise mental processes and focus less on the social aspects of L2 learning. They propose that language learning relies on general learning skills and are concerned with how second language (L2) knowledge is stored and processed in the brain. *Information processing* is a cognitive theory that argues that learning takes place as learners are exposed to language input. Learners need the chance to receive lots of input that contains positive evidence, that is, examples of what is possible in a language. Tasks, which require learners to process language for meaning, can be designed to help with this process and so to promote language learning (Robinson, 2001). The *noticing hypothesis* (Schmidt, 1995) proposes that learners must attend to language forms (i.e., notice specific linguistic items) in language input that they are exposed to in order for these forms to potentially become intake, that is, processed in some way so that they can eventually be incorporated into the learner's developing language system. Tasks can be designed to enhance the possibility that learners will notice target language forms. Furthermore, learners' attention can be directed to a particular language form at any stage during the cycle of a task (Ellis, 2003). What is important is that this attention to language form occurs in a context where the primary focus is on meaning. The *output hypothesis* (Swain, 2005) argues that opportunities for learners to produce language output support the acquisition of language. In working at output tasks, learners may have opportunities to notice gaps between what they *want* to say and *can* say, to reflect on their output (Robinson, 2011), and to receive feedback about their performance, which may include the correction of errors and/or information about what is not possible in the target language (i.e., negative evidence). These opportunities can promote awareness of, and reflection on, grammar. They can help learners notice aspects of language form and so promote learning.

The *interaction hypothesis* (Long, 1983, 1996), which also views the processes involved in language acquisition from a cognitive perspective, marries together some of these theoretical positions, specifying a role for both input and output in language learning. This theoretical perspective is, according to Pica et al. (1993), the one that

best supports the use of communication tasks. As learners, or a learner interacting with a more proficient speaker, work to understand each other, they negotiate meaning to increase comprehension, they receive feedback about their use or understanding of the language, and they modify output, or their use of language, in response to this feedback. All these processes drive L2 acquisition. In other words, the input and information that the learner receives interacts with the learners' internal cognitive processes, such as noticing and hypothesis testing, to promote language acquisition (Keck & Kim, 2014). A common feature of all these cognitive perspectives on language learning is that learning is incidental rather than intentional. Incidental learning results in implicit language knowledge, the type of knowledge that learners have of their first language so that they are able to use the language fluently and spontaneously without having to think consciously about how they use it (Ellis et al., 2009).

Since Long's interaction hypothesis there has been considerable research examining the effects of task-based interaction. For example, two meta-analyses (Keck et al., 2006; Mackey & Goo, 2007), conclude that learners who take part in task-based interaction make greater language learning gains than learners who receive a different type of instruction.

From a sociocultural perspective

In this theoretical viewpoint, second language learning is seen as taking place *in*, and *through*, participation in social interaction (Newman & Holzman, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978), rather than as a *result* of social interaction. According to sociocultural theory, learning is facilitated as learners build meaning together and scaffold or support one another to use language for their own purposes. It is important, for learning and language development, that students receive assistance in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the difference between what a learner can do on his or her own and what they can do with assistance. Gradually a learner will be able to use independently language forms that they have previously needed assistance with. When this happens, learning is said to have taken place. The co-construction and scaffolding that is central to this perspective is very similar to the type of interaction that researchers holding to a cognitive-interactive perspective also find facilitative of acquisition. In both theoretical traditions, learning is facilitated as a learner interacts with a more proficient speaker and receives support. In sociocultural theory, tasks can assist language learning because they can create conditions for learners to receive scaffolded help and engage in collaborative dialogue. These opportunities are not, however, created by the tasks themselves, but rather by the way in which they are performed by participants (Ellis, 2003). Sociocultural theory, drawing on activity theory (Lantolf, 2000), claims that the same task will be approached in different ways by different learners and so may result in very different kinds of activity, or be performed in different ways (Ellis, 2003).

The pedagogical rationale for tasks

There are a number of pedagogical reasons why teachers might use tasks in their language classroom.

Authentic and meaningful use of language

In a foreign language learning context, the language learner may not have many opportunities to use the language to communicate meaningfully, to function as a language *user*. In a second language learning context, in contrast, the learner will often have the opportunity to use the language outside of the classroom (both to process language input and to produce output). TBLT, with its emphasis on what learners are able to *do* with the language (Norris, 2009), gives learners the opportunity to communicate meaningfully and to use language in authentic and meaningful ways that are similar to how it is used in the real world (Ellis, 2009). For example, Ellis and Shintani (2014) argue that, in many classrooms, there are few opportunities for *pushed* or *modified* output. In pushed output, the learner is challenged to produce language at the “cutting edge” of their linguistic competence, that is, at the limit of their ability and thus requiring effort on their part. In modified output, the learner modifies language production, usually as a result of feedback they have received.

Tasks which provide opportunities for the productive use of language may require learners to push or modify output and also to improvise, paraphrase, repair and reorganise what they say. These skills all reflect natural language use and can promote language acquisition (Brumfit, 1979; Ellis, 1994; Skehan, 1996).

The development of language fluency

Nation and Macalister (2010) point out that one of the biggest obstacles to fluency development in the classroom is lack of opportunity to use the target language to communicate outside of the classroom. They stress the need for fluency activities that make use of items learners have encountered several days or weeks before, arguing that these should constitute approximately one quarter of the time spent in the classroom. In working at the development of fluency, learners have the opportunity to automatise the language they know and potentially call on and develop implicit language knowledge. This notion of using tasks to prioritise the development of fluency fits well with Brumfit’s (1985, p. 12) idea of a “syllabus with holes in it.” These holes are times when no new material is presented and students complete fluency directed activities. This model of task use, which, in the way it is described, tends to suggest the periodic use of tasks, aligns with a task-supported approach to language teaching, which will be described more fully later. The idea that learners

have the opportunity to use language they *know*, fits well with one of the criteria for a task (see Chapter 2), that is, that learners need to rely on their own language resources (linguistic or nonlinguistic) to complete the task (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). This allows them to choose for themselves the language they use and, at the same time, to produce language that is not always predictable.

Motivating learners

Perhaps one of the most convincing reasons for using tasks in the language classroom is that they are motivating for learners (East, 2012; Erlam, 2015a). In Erlam's study (2015a), teachers talked about how learners were motivated to use language in the ways that it is used outside of the classroom. TBLT was seen as being more fun in that it led to more oral language use in the classroom and provided opportunities for learners to interact with their peers, an aspect that the learners who participated in the research project informing this book often reported as contributing significantly to their enjoyment of lessons (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The options for TBLT in the pedagogical context

The literature claims that there are a number of ways in which TBLT and tasks may be used in the classroom.

Task-based learning and teaching approach

In the first of these, the *Task-based learning and teaching* approach, tasks define both the curriculum and the syllabus and determine how learners will be assessed (Long, 1985). The tasks, and the language that is activated by these tasks, are determined according to the needs of the students (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). A task-based approach to curriculum, syllabus, and assessment design is seen to accord with what is known about how learners acquire a second language. Proponents (e.g., Long, 2015) argue that the adoption of a syllabus which specifies a predetermined sequence of language structures that are to be taught is inappropriate. This is because it cannot be assumed that the same language or syllabus will be appropriate for all learners, nor that learners will be developmentally ready to incorporate this language into their L2 repertoire. Acquisition, as it is used here, refers to the ability to use language spontaneously, similar to how a native speaker might. In other words, it refers to the development of *implicit*, rather than *explicit* language knowledge.

The rejection of a structural syllabus, outlining the language forms to be taught, in favour of the adoption of a task-based syllabus and curriculum has consequences for form-focused instruction. Ellis (2001, p. 1–2) defines form-focused instruction as ‘any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to language form’. In task-based language teaching this focus of attention on language form is incidental, rather than planned. It arises from an instructional context which is not oriented to the teaching of specific forms and where the student is focused on communicating meaning. It is typically referred to as focus on form (Long, 1988). On the other hand, however, in a structural syllabus, attention to language form tends to be planned. Discrete linguistic targets will be selected and taught in an attempt to influence the interlanguage development of learners. Lessons thus usually involve an explicit focus on the pre-selected linguistic target and students are aware of what this linguistic target is. This approach is referred to as focus on formS (Long, 1988).

While, as we have seen above, in a strong version of the Task-based learning and teaching approach, there is an emphasis on a focus on form approach and on attention to language form arising incidentally during task performance, more nuanced versions of this approach also exist. These more nuanced versions do not preclude other options for focusing on language form. For example, there is a place for the use of *focused* tasks which may be designed to orientate learners to the use of a particular linguistic feature (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1988).

Despite the fact that there is considerable emphasis in much of the TBLT literature on the importance of curricula and syllabi being defined by tasks, there is evidence to suggest that, while the use of tasks is widespread, the implementation of task-based syllabi remains the exception rather than the rule (Liu et al., 2018; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Shintani, 2016).

Task-referenced teaching and learning approach

In the second approach, tasks are used to set achievement targets (e.g., can participate in casual conversation) and for assessment. Learners are assessed on “competencies” or “attainment targets” (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 59). Their progress through the syllabus is evaluated according to these achievement tasks. There is no assumption about the extent to which tasks may be used in teaching; it is quite possible that a range of teaching approaches may be used to prepare students to reach these targets.

Task-supported language teaching (TSLT) approach

In a TSLT approach, tasks are incorporated into the learning cycle as key elements. They are seen as tools that may enrich the syllabus. While they can be exploited by teachers in order to promote language learning, the key feature of a TSLT approach is that they are not used to define the curriculum and syllabus. For example, one way a task may be used in a task-supported approach is at the final stage in a Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) sequence. In PPP, learners are, first given explicit information about a target structure, or a particular aspect of language (present stage), then work at controlled practice exercises, and finally, are given opportunities for free production of the target structure. It is at this produce stage of the lesson or unit that learners are often given the opportunity to work at a task (Nation & Macalister, 2010). In a task-supported approach, there is a greater focus on intentional learning (Ellis et al., 2009). Learners' attention is specifically directed to predetermined language forms, whereas in a TBLT approach, attention to form arises out of the task, and is therefore more likely to be incidental than intentional. *Skill acquisition* theory supports the concept of intentional learning, arguing that explicit knowledge, that is, conscious knowledge about language (e.g., knowledge of language rules), can help learners learn language that, with practice, they will be able to use in spontaneous communication (DeKeyser, 1998).

Task-supported language teaching has been described as a weak form of TBLT (Ellis, 2003). We argue, as do Samuda and Bygate (2008), that this view is unfortunate and that it obscures the task as a pedagogic construct in its own right. Rather than seeing TSLT as a weak form of TBLT, it is interesting to investigate the many ways that tasks are used to support learning outcomes for students (Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

There are encouraging examples in the literature of the implementation of TBLT within language programmes (e.g., Gatbonton, 2015; Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2011; Van den Branden, 2006). However, it is also clear that TBLT is not easy to implement (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). We will explore, in the next section, some of the issues that might need to be considered in embedding TBLT within a language programme.

Issues to consider in the implementation of TBLT

The syllabus

Many teachers are required to work with a structural syllabus, that is, one that specifies a list of linguistic items that are to be taught in a prescribed order. Hu and McKay (2012) document, for example, that the use of structural syllabi for language teaching is widespread in schools in Asia. A syllabus will, furthermore, often be accompanied by a textbook specifying more precisely what is to be taught. Hu (2013) describes how teachers in her study in China taught to the textbook in the belief that if they had done this, they had met the requirements of their job. Approaching language teaching with a focus on a series of linguistic items, as prescribed by a syllabus, textbook, or both, is difficult to reconcile with TBLT where the content is specified in terms of tasks determined according to the communicative needs of learners.

One possible solution to this problem, for teachers who are required to teach to a structural syllabus, is to use focused tasks (Ellis, 2003). Focused tasks can be designed to draw learners' attention to specific language forms. However, this approach does not solve the issue that learners do not acquire grammar as a series of predetermined and separate linguistic entities. Another solution, according to Ellis (2019), is to employ a modular syllabus where a linguistic and a task-based syllabus are used in parallel. The two syllabi would be quite separate and there would be no attempt to link them. Such an approach might not be practical in all instructional contexts, however.

The assessment-driven curriculum

A structural syllabus tends to be associated with an examination system that requires learners to demonstrate knowledge of particular language forms. Such an assessment system does not align well with a TBLT syllabus specified by tasks that are determined in relation to learner needs. Traditional examination systems can present problems, not just for TBLT, but for any approach to language teaching that emphasises communicative competence (e.g., Carless, 2007; Hu, 2002). With respect to TBLT, there is considerable documentation of teacher concern that a task-based approach may not adequately prepare students to pass national exams (Dao, 2016; Hu, 2013; Yim, 2009; Zheng & Borg, 2014). In a study based in the New Zealand context, the same context which informs the research in this book, East (2014a) reported, from a study of preservice teachers, that some expressed concern about how TBLT might be integrated with high-stakes assessment. This would not seem to be a problem if the achievement and assessment targets are themselves tasks, as is the case in a task-referenced approach to language teaching.

The beginner language learner

Critics of TBLT have suggested that it is not an appropriate approach for beginner learners who lack oral proficiency in the language that they are learning (Carless, 2007; Swan, 2005). Teachers have also referred to lack of proficiency on the part of the learner as a constraint to the implementation of TBLT (Erlam, 2015a; Pham & Nguyen, 2018; Yim, 2009). Key to this problem is a tendency for teachers to see tasks as requiring learners to produce language (Erlam, 2016a). This objection would seem less pertinent if the importance of tasks that are designed to provide the learner with language input, and the role that these can have for the beginner learner could be acknowledged. There are now encouraging examples in the literature of complete beginners successfully learning from input-based tasks (Erlam & Ellis, 2018; Shintani, 2016).

The foreign-language proficiency of the teacher

Some teachers may feel that they lack the proficiency in the language they are teaching to be able to implement TBLT, or even use tasks in the classroom in a task-supported approach (Carless, 2004; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Yim, 2009). The reality for many teachers teaching in a foreign language learning context is that they themselves speak the language they are teaching as a second or foreign language. In a study of three primary school teachers in Hong Kong, Carless (2004) found that teachers questioned whether they had the language proficiency necessary to implement TBLT. Shintani (2016) documented widespread anxiety amongst elementary school teachers in Japan about their perceived level of proficiency in English. However, she concluded that this is not the main problem working against the implementation of TBLT in Asia. She claimed that, if teachers do use tasks in their classrooms, it may help them to improve their language proficiency and suggested that, for those teachers who struggle to have the language they need for a given task, the use of scripts may help.

Lack of resources and time

Teachers consistently mention lack of resources and lack of time to plan tasks as a constraint to the use of tasks in the language classroom; this has been documented as the most commonly mentioned difficulty in implementing TBLT (Erlam, 2015a; Pham & Nguyen, 2018; Zheng & Borg, 2014). In her study of teachers in the New Zealand school system, Erlam (2015a) found that 25% of her 48 respondents referred to a lack of time to design or make tasks. Time is also mentioned in the literature, in

relation both to the time needed for teachers to adapt their practice to TBLT (Van Avermaet et al., cited in Van den Branden et al., 2009) and for students to adjust to a new way of being taught (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007).

Teachers' understanding of the construct of task

Another issue is teachers' understanding of TBLT and of the construct of task (e.g., Andon & Eckerth, 2009; East, 2014a). In her article entitled, "I'm Still Not Sure What a Task Is': Teachers Designing Language Tasks," Erlam (2016a) documented difficulty with understanding the concept of task as a factor that might impact on teachers' ability to use tasks in their practice. In this study, a number of teachers had problems understanding the criteria that were used to differentiate a task from an activity or exercise.

Maintaining control and orienting learners to tasks and TBLT

For some teachers there is a fear that there will be a loss of control with the use of tasks in the language classroom (Carless, 2004; Erlam, 2015a; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Linsen, 1994). There have also been concerns reported that students find the open-ended nature of tasks too difficult, even that they might be inclined to panic at the demands that tasks make on them. This would seem to be less of an issue if students could be oriented to TBLT, taught how to use tasks and, of course, supported in their use of them.

The New Zealand context

Given that this book documents a study conducted with teachers in New Zealand schools, it is important that the reader understand the foreign language learning context which is typical of New Zealand. We provide background information in this next section. We argue that the context we describe is typical of many acquisition-poor language-learning contexts and that, therefore, the research we present here has relevance to contexts beyond our own.

School in New Zealand is compulsory from ages 6 to 17. The languages of instruction are English and Māori (the indigenous language of the country); although Māori is mostly used as the language of instruction in kura kaupapa Māori, or, Māori immersion schools. Some other schools have bilingual language units where students may receive instruction in one of the community languages that form part of New Zealand's linguistic landscape, for example, Samoan.

During the last 3 years of their schooling, students' achievement in the different learning areas of the curriculum is assessed against National Standards through the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) (see below for further information).

The curriculum

The current national curriculum was introduced in 2007 (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2007b). At the time it was seen as an innovation, representing a shift from a prescriptive specification of knowledge to a stronger emphasis on competencies and generic skills. Learning is represented as being experiential and learner-centred with teachers acting as facilitators of learning. Learners and teachers are to co-construct knowledge that is individualised, situated, and contextualised. This curriculum is standards-based and promotes the development of competencies in eight learning areas. While the curriculum is provided at a national level, it allows for considerable flexibility in its implementation. Individual schools and teachers can define the educational priorities for their communities and make decisions as to how the curriculum is to be applied.

The learning languages area in the *New Zealand Curriculum*

The 2007 national curriculum was innovative in that it established a new learning area, the Learning Languages area. This new curriculum area gave a greater priority to the learning of languages and necessitated the provision of a framework for the development, in schools, of programmes in foreign languages. For the first time there was an expectation that students would be entitled to have the opportunity to learn a language at school between Years 7 and 10 (students aged approximately 11 to 14 years). It is important to point out, however, that the *opportunity* to learn a language does not mean that it is a *requirement* for students in these year groups.

The goal of the Foreign Language (FL) curriculum is the development of intercultural communicative competence. The Learning Languages area is comprised of three strands:

1. The core *communication* strand
2. The supporting *language knowledge* strand
3. The supporting *cultural knowledge* strand

Defining communication as the core strand “puts students’ ability to communicate at the centre” (MOE, 2007b, p. 24) with formal knowledge of language and culture as having an important supportive role to play.

The new learning area was accompanied by a review of proficiency statements. As East (2012) describes, these were first aligned to proficiency levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and then aligned to the New Zealand context. The fact that the levels of proficiency were somewhat arbitrary was acknowledged (Council of Europe, 2001), as was the fact that these statements did not specify topics, language, functions, and structures. The MOE (2017) made these significant changes clear to teachers in a summary entitled, “what’s new or different.” The two changes most relevant, for the purposes of our study, were, firstly, that there were no longer language-specific guidelines with specific achievement objectives. Since 2010, achievement objectives which are generic across languages are used as the basis of language programmes. Furthermore, there were no longer prescribed lists of topics with associated vocabulary and grammar structures for each language at each curriculum level. Since 2010, vocabulary and structures have not been prescribed in the curriculum (see below, however).

The assessment of learning

The introduction of the new curriculum necessitated a review of the New Zealand high-stakes assessment system. NCEA is a criterion-based assessment system which aims to cater for both summative (assessment *of* learning) and formative (assessment *for* learning) approaches to assessment. It operates at three levels, Years 11, 12, and 13. Students complete both internal assessments, which are teacher constructed and teacher assessed, and external assessments, which are set and marked by external examiners.

NCEA for Languages was designed to align with the communicative emphasis of the Learning Languages area of the new curriculum. For example, one new assessment, an internal assessment, known as the “Interact Standard” requires students to “Interact using spoken [language] to communicate personal information, ideas and opinions in different situations” (www.nzqa.govt.nz). Information about the standard says that “reward is given for contributing to and maintaining the interaction” and “some level of spontaneity will be required. This is not a standard which should reward students writing, then learning, pre-scripted role plays” (www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards). Such an assessment aims for interactional authenticity, one way in which Ellis et al. (2020) suggest that task-based assessment

can be implemented when the purpose is to assess the general communicative abilities of learners in a context where there is no defined target domain. It was seen as having the potential to create positive “wash-back,” that is, to have a beneficial effect on teaching practice in New Zealand foreign language classrooms (Erlam, 2015b).

At the same time, however, that it seemed that the curriculum and assessment system was taking the initiative of resisting any prescription of, or constraint around, the language and structures that students should be taught or know, an important decision was taken that weakened this innovation. The decision was made to retain the vocabulary and structure lists which set boundaries for external examiners when writing examination questions. This issue was debated considerably. Teachers argued that it would not be fair for test takers if there were no limits in terms of the language that could be used in assessments (East, 2012). These lists were maintained therefore, although modified, and are published by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). They specify the vocabulary and structures that examiners can draw on for the external assessments at each NCEA level.

Support for language teaching with the implementation of the new curriculum

Teachers needed to be supported in understanding and in implementing the new 2007 languages curriculum with its strong focus on communication. Although foreign language programmes had had a long tradition in New Zealand secondary schools (Waite, 1992), there was, historically, a strong emphasis in classroom practice on the development of language knowledge. The MOE produced a number of resources to support the new focus on communication and to provide the assistance that teachers might need (see East, 2012, for a detailed account). One of these resources, *A Generic Framework for Teaching Languages* (MOE, 2007a) synthesised key aspects of language pedagogy. These included:

- the view of learners as language users;
- the promotion of social interactions where learners make meaning in authentic language use contexts;
- the development of language proficiency in increasingly complex communicative situations; and
- the integration of language and culture throughout the language programme.

Central to this framework were a series of research-based principles that were to provide guidance for how languages could be taught effectively in instructed contexts and serve as a basis against which teachers could evaluate their own teaching practice.

These principles were the synthesis of a literature review that the MOE commissioned from Professor Rod Ellis. In drawing up this list of principles, Ellis describes how he focused on key theoretical claims and seminal studies. The resulting document, *Instructed Second Language Acquisition: A Literature Review* (Ellis, 2005), presented 10 principles of effective instructed language learning, as listed in Table 1. It is important to point out that these principles were offered “as ‘provisional specifications’ (in line with Stenhouse’s (1975) arguments) that [were] best discussed, interpreted, and then tried out by teachers in their own contexts” (Erlam & Sakui, 2006, p. 2).

Table 1. Principles of instructed second language acquisition (Ellis, 2005)

-
1. Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence
 2. Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning
 3. Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form
 4. Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge
 5. Instruction needs to take into account learners’ ‘built-in syllabus’
 6. Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input
 7. Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output
 8. The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency
 9. Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners
 10. In assessing learners’ L2 proficiency it is important to examine free as well as controlled production
-

Another document, produced by the MOE in support of the Learning Languages area, was informed by a study in which Erlam and Sakui looked for evidence of Ellis’s (2005) 10 principles in New Zealand FL classrooms. They first established classroom practices that might constitute evidence of each principle and then collected evidence for the principles in French and Japanese classrooms. The resulting document presented a series of case studies as an evidence base that could inform “teacher professional learning and practice” and that could serve as the “development of exemplars of effective practice” (Erlam & Sakui, 2006, p. 2).

Erlam (2008) describes in detail how the Principles document (Ellis, 2005) and the Case Studies (Erlam & Sakui, 2006) were made widely available to the language teaching community with copies being sent to all schools and presentations and workshops held across the country. As Erlam (2008) concludes, key to the success of ensuring that this SLA research reached its intended audience was the fact that, firstly, “technical knowledge [was made] accessible to practitioners” and, secondly, that they were encouraged “to use it as a tool to reflect on their own teaching practice” (p. 265). In that sense, the commissioned project that resulted in the principles

of instructed SLA (Ellis, 2005) attempted to bridge the gap between research and practice. The efforts made to ensure that teachers engaged in dialogue and reflection about their practice when discussing the outcomes of the project not only validated their teaching experience, but also resulted in research becoming dynamic and available for appropriation (Erlam & Sakui, 2006).

The changes in language teaching pedagogy outlined earlier that were necessitated by the new curriculum focus on communication, along with the expectation that language programmes now accommodate primary students, posed considerable challenges for schools and language teachers. An immediate concern was the need for a sufficient number of qualified teachers to cope with the requirement that all students from Years 7 to 10 have the opportunity to learn a language. Other challenges were also identified in a critical evaluation of the teaching of foreign languages in New Zealand schools at Years 7 and 8 (Gibbs & Holt, 2003). This evaluation recommended that the MOE provide “additional support to develop further both the teacher’s own IL [international language] proficiency and their understanding of IL-appropriate methodologies” (Gibbs & Holt, 2003, p. 71). The Ministry responded to this recommendation swiftly by launching, in 2005, a national programme for teachers of languages, the Teacher Professional Development Languages (TPDL) programme. The programme (described in the next section) intended “to develop teacher language proficiency and second language teaching capabilities in order to improve student language learning outcomes” (Insley & Thomson, 2008, p. 21). A detailed description of this programme is crucial, because it underpins the research context in which the investigation that informs this book took place.

An initiative to equip teachers to teach languages in New Zealand schools – TPDL

From its inception in 2005, the TPDL programme defined two goals:

- develop teachers’ language proficiency in the language they are teaching; and
- equip or upskill them to teach this or another language effectively with an ultimate emphasis on effecting improvement in student learning outcomes.

The year-long programme was made available throughout New Zealand to teachers of international languages (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish) and community languages (mainly languages from the neighbouring Pacific islands). Priority was initially given to teachers of students in Years 7 to 10, but the programme increasingly became available to teachers at all curriculum levels. Enrolments were capped at around 80 per year. Participants in the TPDL programme typically worked in schools

that advocated the inclusion of languages in their curriculum and supported their teachers in developing their pedagogical skills to teach language. Teachers were free to choose to participate, although in some cases may have been encouraged to do so by colleagues or senior staff.

The theoretical basis which underpinned the programme drew extensively from Ellis's 10 principles. These were also used to establish the criteria against which teacher practice would be evaluated during the course of the year over which the programme extended, and the Case Studies (Erlam & Sakui, 2006) informed the type of information that could be collected as evidence for implementation of the principles in classroom practice.

Teachers participating in TPDL completed three interrelated components of the programme (see Figure 1): language study, SLA pedagogy, and in-school support. The overlapping of the circles was significant in that all three were seen to be essential components of the central aim of the programme, that was, the effective teaching of languages. Each of these programme components will be described in more detail below (see Erlam, 2016b; Insley & Thomson, 2008; and Appendix 1 for additional information), but first the authors' relationships with this programme will be outlined.

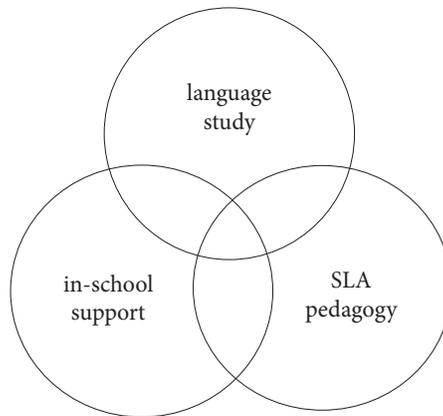


Figure 1. Main components of TPDL programme

Structure and personnel

TPDL was funded by the MOE, but located physically at the University of Auckland. The MOE contracted with the university for the delivery of the SLA pedagogy course. This led to the authors' initial involvement with the programme. At the time of this study, Constanza Tolosa was the coordinator of the SLA pedagogy course and the principal lecturer, responsible also for the marking of all assessments. Rosemary

Erlam contributed to some of the teaching of this course. The TPD director, with responsibility for all aspects of the running of the programme, contracted the involvement of Rosemary Erlam, in the role of Academic Advisor. This was mainly a consultative role and involved Rosemary in overseeing the academic quality of the programme and in advising with regard to academic matters.

The TPD director provided overall oversight of the programme in response to MOE requirements, feedback from teachers, and advice from the Academic Director. The content of the pedagogy course was shaped by decisions made at this level. The TPD director worked with a team comprising an administrator and a group of facilitators who were proficient in the languages that the programme catered for. These facilitators carried out, over the course of the year, four visits to observe programme participants teaching in their specific contexts. This formed the in-school support component of the programme.

The main components of the programme are described in greater detail below.

Language study

The language study component of the programme aimed to allow TPD participants to improve their proficiency in the language they were teaching. Participants were given information about appropriate language courses available in their local areas and enrolment fees were met by the programme. Those who were already proficient in the language they were teaching were encouraged to study another language during the TPD year. The reason for this was two-fold: teachers would have greater potential to contribute in their contexts of employment if they could offer to teach an additional language, and they would also have the valuable recent experience of being a language learner.

SLA pedagogy

The SLA pedagogy component of the programme was delivered over a total of 8 days, spread over the year, in four 2-day blocks. Because TPD was available to teachers throughout New Zealand, the pedagogy component was delivered in at least two (but sometimes three, depending on number of enrolments and geographical location of teachers) cities. Some teachers, that is, those in more rural locations, would travel considerable distances to attend the pedagogy days at the times it was delivered in the centre closest to them. For the sake of consistency, the same content was delivered in each location.

The introduction days

The 2 introduction days were run by the TPD team, however, Rosemary Erlam was asked to contribute some content. The main aims were that teachers would meet each other and understand the purpose and requirements of the TPD programme. The teachers were also given initial practical and pedagogical tools that they needed to implement the Ellis principles in their language classrooms. There was a particular emphasis on equipping teachers to help learners build up a repertoire of formulaic expressions (Principle 1) so that they would be able to use the target language meaningfully (Principles 2, 7). At the same time, the teachers were prepared for understanding the concept of a task and the TBLT approach. Over these 2 days, the teachers experienced a variety of language learning and teaching activities and tasks, and they had the opportunity to discuss how effective practice might be supported by the use of each activity and task.

During these 2 introductory days, teachers were not explicitly taught about tasks, although as will be explained below, they had the opportunity to engage in experiential learning about tasks. The TPD director had requested that there be an emphasis on the Ellis (2005) principles at this stage of the programme, and that tasks and TBLT be introduced subsequently in the following pedagogy days. This was for two main reasons. The first was that the TPD team felt that some teachers had become too narrowly focused on whether they were teaching a task, rather than on thinking more widely about their classroom practice in terms of implementing the principles of effective instructed learning. A second reason for delaying an explicit focus on tasks and TBLT was that, in a previous year, there had been criticism (from programme evaluation feedback) that TBLT had been mandated as the only methodological approach that had any merit. It was for this reason also, as will be discussed further below, that teachers were introduced to TSLT rather than to TBLT.

However, while there was no explicit information given about tasks during these 2 days, teachers were prepared for a subsequent focus on tasks and TBLT.

1. They were given the TPD programme booklet which contained information about tasks and TSLT. It briefly outlined a rationale for TSLT, listed the task criteria (Ellis & Shintani, 2014) outlined below (Figure 2) and described the stages of a task cycle.
2. Teachers had the opportunity to learn experientially about tasks through completing a number of these. For example, the “Find Out Who” game required them to mix and interact in order to find, in the group, the person who fulfilled a specific criterion that each had been given (e.g., the person who has been to the most unusual place). During a lecture on assessment, they completed three

input-based tasks (one taken from Erlam & Ellis, 2018). Later in the programme, when TBLT was introduced, references were made back to the tasks that they had experienced on Day 2 and these were evaluated against task criteria as a way of informing and helping teachers learn about the construct of task.

3. Many of the resources, which the teachers were given during the language workshop component of the introduction days (in particular, to help learners build up a repertoire of formulaic expressions), constituted tasks. For example, teachers were given a song along with a set of pictures which students would be asked to put in correct order as they listened to the song. As the teachers were given these resources, they were reminded that they might need to adapt them to their own specific teaching contexts. Teachers were also reminded that they should look for evidence of student learning as they used these tasks and activities.

The course content of pedagogy Days 3 to 8

During the remaining 6 days of the SLA pedagogy component, the teachers completed a 36-hour language teaching course delivered exclusively for the TPDL programme. The course aimed to support teachers' understanding of SLA and language teaching theories, broaden their curriculum knowledge and enhance their classroom pedagogy. Ellis's principles underpinned most of the content of this course. TBLT and tasks were presented as ways in which the Ellis principles could be operationalised or implemented into their teaching practice. The construct of task that was used with the teachers was taken from Ellis and Shintani (2014) (See Figure 2). Complementing the Ellis principles was the framework for Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (Newton et al., 2010), focusing on the development of intercultural competence through language learning.

Figure 2. Task criteria

Task criteria (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 135)

1. The primary focus should be on "meaning"
2. There should be some kind of "gap"
3. Learners should largely rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic)
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language.

Pedagogically, the course modelled effective practice by engaging the teachers in active and experiential learning of content. It included systematic reflection on the links between theory and research, and gave participants the opportunity to reflect on, and talk about, their own experiences as language learners and language teachers. In order to support the teachers' application of Ellis's principles, the course used

concepts, readings, and resources derived from TBLT (e.g., East, 2012; Ellis, 2009; Erlam, 2016a; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 2004).

An outline of the content of Days 3 to 8 of the pedagogy course, as presented to programme participants in the pedagogy course-book, is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Pedagogy Days 3 to 8 course schedule

Day	Indicative content and readings
Day 3	Learning Languages and the <i>New Zealand Curriculum</i> Principles of Instructed Second Language Acquisition Pedagogy for learning languages Information about the Reading Logs
Day 4	Focus on meaning in the language classroom Focus on form in the language classroom Introduction to Task-supported language teaching Information about the test (Day 5)
Day 5	Test Intercultural communicative language teaching Teaching diverse learners Task-supported language teaching
Day 6	Planning with tasks Tasks in the language classroom Preparing for the Learning Inquiry assessment
Day 7	Revisiting the Principles of Instructed Language Acquisition (and a new principle) Assessing language tasks
Day 8	Learning Inquiry presentations

More specific information about the ways in which teachers were introduced to and learnt about tasks and TBLT over these 6 days is given below.

Days 3 and 4

The initial focus was on introducing the teachers to the requirements and expectations of the New Zealand curriculum for languages. The content, therefore included a focus on Ellis's principles and a description of the pedagogical features expected in the teaching of languages in New Zealand. This was followed by an introduction to the distinction between focus on form and focus on meaning, used as a way of making explicit differences in approaching language teaching. In our experience teaching the course, we knew that most teachers had been taught languages following a grammar-based approach. Therefore, we considered it important that the teachers were aware of how the focus on the development of communicative competence (emphasised in the *New Zealand Curriculum*) required a different approach to language teaching. This comparison served as a preamble to the introduction of TSLT that closed these 2 days.

As explained before, the TPDL programme introduced tasks as a way in which Ellis's principles could be operationalised. The session on TSLT started by clarifying that the *New Zealand Curriculum* promoted TBLT as one of a range of "activity-based approaches" (MOE, 2012). Teachers were then introduced to a comparison of different definitions of tasks, an analysis of Ellis's and Shintani's definition of task, and a comparison of two types of lesson structures: a PPP structure and a TBLT cycle (following Willis, 1996). Teachers were invited to share recent lessons they had taught and identify the structure they were following. The day finished with the teachers working in groups to revisit Days 1 and 2 of TPDL, analysing whether the activities they had engaged in were tasks or not, using the task criteria.

During these initial 2 days, the content was delivered using a task-based approach where, for example, teachers would work in groups to organise paragraphs provided to recompose a text, or they would work in language groups to complete an information-gap task focusing on the Ellis's principles. After each of these short tasks, teachers were encouraged to reflect on the pedagogical characteristics of the tasks (for example, the need for interaction or having a clear outcome). This experiential approach of engaging teachers with the content was consistent with the pedagogy underpinning TBLT.

Days 5 and 6

The initial focus on these 2 days was introducing the Principles of Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (Newton et al. 2010), the second set of principles underpinning the New Zealand curriculum for languages. This introduction was illustrated by intercultural tasks that the teachers engaged with. The rest of the time was dedicated to revisiting the TSLT session from Day 4, analysing the concept of task and task criteria, planning with tasks, and discussing some of the realities of working with tasks that the teachers were already experiencing. The work completed during these 2 days included an overview of the readings on TBLT that teachers had done for their first reading log and in preparation for these sessions; and an identification and evaluation of tasks that the teachers had already experienced during the programme. As previously, during Days 5 and 6 teachers were engaged in working with tasks. The teachers completed a number of language tasks for beginners in their language groups. After each task, the group analysed and discussed how it corresponded to task criteria.

On Day 6, time was spent in groups to plan lessons using tasks and to prepare the teachers for the Learning Inquiry assignment. This preparation included a description of the requirements of the assignment, a review of the concept of inquiry (following the MOE description of teaching inquiries), and time for brainstorming possible inquiry topics.

Day 7

There were two components to the session “assessing language tasks,” hinging on two ways in which the word assessment could be used. In the first of these, teachers assessed a series of tasks to establish to what extent they fulfilled task criteria (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). In this part of the session the focus was therefore on task design and the tasks that the teachers worked with were taken from the Erlam (2016a) paper “I’m Still Not Sure What a Task Is”: Teachers Designing Language Tasks.” The content of this session component drew heavily on this article. In the second part, the focus was a return to the principles of valid assessment, and on how learners may be assessed following the completion of tasks and on how tasks may be used to assess learning.

Day 8

Each TPDL participant presented his/her Learning Inquiry to the whole group. This involved a description of the task that they designed and taught, and an evaluation of its effectiveness. In describing and evaluating their tasks, many of the teachers used the Ellis and Shintani (2014) criteria.

Course assessment

The teachers completed three assignments in which they were expected to explicitly demonstrate connections between research and theory and their own practices. The second and third assignments required teachers to engage with TBLT literature and demonstrate understanding of TBLT and tasks.

1. In-class test

Teachers had to explain one of the Ellis (2005) principles, say why it was important for language learning and discuss how it could be applied in their teaching context.

2. Reading log (20%)

There were two reading logs. In the first, teachers had to choose one of three readings on TBLT and answer questions related to it (see Chapter 2 for further information). The second reading log required choice of a reading related to Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching.

3. Learning inquiry (50%)

Teachers were asked to design, teach and evaluate a language task (see Chapter 3 for further information).

In-school support component

The in-school support component provided for each TPDL participant to be visited four times over the course of the year by a TPDL facilitator (experienced language teachers trained to provide pedagogical support and collect learning evidence in classrooms). On each occasion the facilitator observed the participating teacher as s/he taught a lesson with her/his language class. During the observation, the facilitator took detailed notes of the lesson, manually transcribing as much as possible of the teacher and students' discourse. These notes formed the basis of a learning discussion that took place after the lesson, prompting the teacher to reflect on and evaluate their own practice (Dangel et al., 2004; Scarino, 2014). This discussion did not specifically address the use of tasks or implementation of TBLT, however, there was a focus on practice that is consistent with TBLT principles. For example, teachers were asked to think about whether they created opportunities for students to use the target language "as a tool for communication."

So that the data collected from these observations would be as reliable as possible, all TPDL facilitators used a template that identified the areas to be observed (e.g., use of the target language, opportunities for interaction) and guided them in their note-taking. This template was used to document practice over the course of the year and thus provided evidence of any changes in practice.

The authors of this manuscript had no jurisdiction over, or involvement in, this aspect of the programme, although, as Academic Advisor, Rosemary Erlam was, at times, asked for advice. More information about this component of the TPDL programme, including data collected, as part of a research project (Erlam, 2016b) over the course of a year from one teacher participant, is available in Appendix 1.

The current research and its relationship to the TPDL programme

While the TPDL team collected a lot of data from the TPDL teacher participants during their year of involvement in the programme, not all of this was available to the authors for the purposes of this study. For example, no data from the in-school support component was incorporated in the research informing this manuscript. The research project informing the writing of the current manuscript stood outside the TPDL programme, conducted by the authors only, although with the knowledge and consent of the TPDL team and director. It involved Ethics consent from all participants; a key consideration was to keep demands on participants to a minimum so as to encourage involvement. A summary of data collected in relation to each of the two main parts of the project (explained in greater detail in subsequent chapters) is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Scheduling of data collected in relation to TPDL programme

Study/ book stage	Data collected	Time period of data collection in relation to teacher participation in TPDL
Part 1	Reading logs	During the year teachers participated in TPDL
	Learning inquiry projects	
	Interviews	Year immediately following TPDL
	Classroom observations	
	Student questionnaires	
Part 2	Classroom observations	A longer time period subsequent to completion of TPDL, on average 4 years later
	Student questionnaires	
	Interviews	

Summary of factors relevant to implementation of TBLT/tasks in the New Zealand context

This chapter has endeavoured to present a general overview of aspects of the New Zealand context which are relevant to this study. In this next section we present a summary of factors which are relevant more specifically to the implementation of TBLT in this context and to teachers' uptake and use of tasks in their language classrooms.

Learning a language is not a requirement

Reference has been made in an earlier section of this chapter to the fact that learning a foreign or second language at school in New Zealand is not a requirement. The current curriculum (MOE, 2007b) required students from Years 7 to 10 to have the opportunity to learn a language; however, this stipulation aimed only to provide students with the option of learning a language.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the fact that language learning is not mandated for all students in the New Zealand educational context, language classes tend to be poorly subscribed. Part of this can be attributed to rhetoric at government level which puts heavy emphasis on the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and maths). The fact that New Zealand has had a strong monolingual tradition, with English as the first and only language of the majority of New Zealanders, is also a contributing factor (although Māori was given legal status as an official language in 1987, only 4% of the population speaks the language). The consequences, for the classroom language teacher, are the ongoing difficulties of encouraging students to choose to learn a language, but, more importantly, of retaining students

in language classrooms in the senior years of study (Years 11 to 13). It is against this backdrop, where teachers are seeking to motivate students to continue language study, that the implementation of TBLT and the use of tasks has taken place in the New Zealand context.

The acquisition-poor context

Earlier in this chapter, the New Zealand FL learning context has been described as one which is acquisition-poor. For those students who do choose to learn a language at school, classes may be scheduled for as little as 1 hour per week (especially for younger learners). In many schools, younger language learners (Years 7 to 9) are offered “taster” language classes throughout a school year. This means that, for the duration of the year, they are given the chance to experience learning a number of different languages, each for a limited number of hours during the period of a set number of weeks or for a semester, subsequent to which they are to select one of these with which to continue the following year. The maximum number of hours offered to language students, in the research project informing this book, was no more than 4 hours a week. The fact that there is usually no exposure to the target language outside of the language classroom, and that many students do not begin consistent language study until Years 9 or 10, has implications for the level of proficiency which students attain in the target language. This has a potential impact on the implementation of TBLT and tasks in the New Zealand classroom.

The curriculum

The 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum* was innovative and a departure from earlier curriculum documents in that it created a distinct Learning Languages area. Arguably, however, the greatest shift was from a curriculum that specified the vocabulary, topics, and grammatical structures that were to be taught, along with the stages at which they should be taught, to one that did not attempt to define or prescribe any of these. Such a curriculum could be seen to align well with the implementation of TBLT. It is important to point out, however, that the curriculum did not mandate that teachers adopt a TBLT approach to language teaching. Rather, as East (2012) points out, at best, it implicitly endorsed such an approach.

NCEA – the assessment system

While NCEA attempted to align assessment with the new curriculum emphasis on communication and adopt a policy of not constraining the language to which students would be exposed in the language classroom, this was difficult to implement in practice. Teachers were reluctant to see that this would constitute fair and transparent assessment practice for their students. Therefore, NZQA continued to publish lists of vocabulary and structures which would constrain the use of language in assessments for students at Years 11 to 13.

The post-method phase in language teaching

The teachers whose journey and practice we describe in this book were mainly introduced to TBLT and to the construct of task in the TPDL programme which is outlined above. It is important to point out that, in this programme, there was an emphasis on principles of effective instructed language learning (Ellis, 2005) rather than on the notion of a best method for language teaching. This has been referred to as a post-method perspective (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Consistent with the approach described in Erlam (2008) and in Erlam and Sakui (2006), TBLT was not described to teachers as the method that they must (or needed to) adopt in their classroom practice. This was particularly the case during the pedagogical component of the course, but it was also characteristic of the way that the facilitators worked with the teacher participants. Rather, TBLT and tasks were presented as ways in which the SLA principles could be embodied in classroom practice. The principles themselves were presented to participants as provisional specifications (Ellis, 2003; Stenhouse, 1975). At all times, the expertise and experience of these teachers was acknowledged, and they were credited as being the ones who could best decide what was appropriate for their instructional contexts. They were encouraged to try out new ideas and to evaluate for themselves the evidence for effective student learning. This approach was not unique to our context; it was consistent with that adopted by Van den Branden (2006), for example, where teachers were encouraged to gradually take ownership of tasks and to be active in implementing change in their contexts. At the same time, detaching the task from the idea of a best method of language teaching, allowed for a greater focus, in the programme, on the task as a pedagogic tool and on the different ways that tasks can be used in language teaching (Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

Outline of the book

In this book, we investigate how teachers learn about tasks and TBLT and how they understand this new approach to language teaching. We document whether they implement tasks and TBLT in their classroom practice, in both the short and longer term, and in what way. We focus on a group of teachers who all completed the TPDL programme, where they were introduced to (some for the first time) and taught about TBLT and tasks. As we explain in the Introduction, our approach is bottom-up. In this way we seek to engage with the “practices, demands, pressures and perspectives of stakeholders in real world classrooms” (Bygate, 2020, p. 275). We investigate the pedagogical realities that teachers face as they implement tasks and TBLT and, from this bottom-up approach, draw conclusions, both for teacher professional development and for our current understanding and framing of tasks and TBLT.

The book is divided into two parts, each one in relation to a different participant group. The first part, written mainly by Constanza Tolosa, presents data that will be used to investigate how a group of 14 teachers go through the process of learning about and implementing tasks. Data collected from coursework documents the learning of these teachers while, as a group, they complete the year-long TPDL in-service programme. During this year, they attempt to make sense of the concepts crucial to tasks and TBLT and gradually internalise these. They are given opportunities to design tasks and implement them in their instructional contexts. The study follows up on these teachers in the year subsequent to the programme, investigating to what extent they indicate that they use tasks in their classroom contexts and how they use them.

The second part of the book, written mainly by Rosemary Erlam, focuses on a group of teachers who are removed, in terms of time, from their initial opportunity to learn about and first use tasks and TBLT. It presents data from eight teachers who had all previously completed TPDL some years (on average four) prior to taking part in this research project. The aim of this section is to investigate firstly, whether these teachers were, of their own volition, implementing tasks and TBLT in their ongoing programmes, and for those teachers who were using tasks, to explore how they were using them, and with what potential benefit for language learning. It also presents data documenting students’ response to lessons where they worked at tasks. It explores the understanding that the eight teachers had of tasks and TBLT, the priority that they afforded them in their teaching contexts, and those factors that enabled or constrained their implementation of TBLT. In this second part of the book, the emphasis is very much on the task as a pedagogic tool and on the different ways in which tasks may be used to create opportunities for language learning (Samuda & Bygate, 2008).

In examining how TBLT is both understood and implemented, we are able, in our conclusion, to make practical implications for teacher development courses which introduce teachers to this methodology. At the same time, we demonstrate that analysis of our data may suggest how some of the theoretical framing of tasks and TBLT could be reconsidered. These two main aims underpin this manuscript, and are themes throughout; however, it is in the conclusion, Chapter 8, that they are addressed more completely.

