Language teachers continue to struggle with successful implementation of the task-based language teaching approach in their classrooms. This paper presents a model for teachers to frame classroom task processes enabling learners to accomplish task goals. The framework draws on and advances previous research on definitions of tasks, task features and classroom task performance.
Introduction
Research into task-based language teaching (TBLT) has progressed over the last 30 years. While much of the research has focused on defining what constitutes a task, very little practical advice has been offered to teachers, and the few attempts at practical solutions are overly-complicated. To shift the TBLT movement from academia to the classroom, teachers need a framework with which they can manage classroom interaction.

Objectives
Teachers often express great interest in TBLT, but they have no idea where to start. This paper gives teachers a framework for classroom task processes composed of a pre-task, a main task and a post-task.

The paper begins with a brief review of relevant literature that has been influential in defining what a task is and developing classroom task processes for teachers and learners. This is followed by an explanation of four primary classroom characteristics of tasks. From here, the paper moves on to lay out a framework for classroom task processes. To conclude the paper, issues with the framework are discussed.

Literature Review
Defining task has proved to be one of the most contended issues in research. Long (1985) defines tasks as everyday activities that people undertake to accomplish a specific goal. While Long’s definition provides teachers with a starting point, it does little to aid in classroom application.

Skehan (1998) identified five features of tasks which have become the foundation of many current definitions.
1. Meaning is primary.
2. Learners do not regurgitate meanings from teachers, course books or other sources.
3. There is a connection between a real-world activity and the classroom task.
4. Task completion has some priority.
5. Task outcomes are the basis for assessment.

Willis and Willis (2007, p.13) pose 6 questions that guide educators in determining whether an activity is a task.
1. Does the activity engage learners’ interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the classroom activity relate to real world activities?

Ellis (2009) extends the discussion by providing 4 criteria that an activity must satisfy in order to be labeled as a task.
1. Pragmatic as well as semantic meanings should be emphasized.
2. There should be some kind of knowledge ‘gap’ that learners must navigate.
3. Learners should make use of their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources during task performance.
4. There is a clearly defined task outcome outside of language use.

Ellis (2006) lays out three phases of tasks- pre-task, during task and post-task. Ellis describes activities that teachers can utilize in the pre and post-task phases. However, certain features and options he describes are unclear leaving the teacher with more questions than answers.

Oxford (2006) identifies specific activities that constitute task types, such as problem-solving, information gaps and picture stories. Oxford presents Salaberry’s (2001) classroom task framework (Table 1), which highlights teacher and learner roles during task performance. Oxford and Salaberry even go as far as including examples of classroom interaction at each stage. However, the purpose of each stage in Salaberry’s model is not entirely clear. Educators are hesitant to adopt teaching approaches that are not accompanied by clear steps and objectives.

Table 1: Salaberry’s task stages (Oxford, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Stage</th>
<th>Participant Task Roles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Introduction of topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Illustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Willis and Willis explain that a task sequence made up of several tasks that occur in a pre-specified order enable learners to navigate activities and negotiate meanings effectively. Facilitating tasks are carried out before the primary task. Facilitating tasks are an integral part of the task sequence according to Willis and Willis, because they ‘prime’ and ‘prepare’ the learners for the target or classroom task. Despite the plethora of examples provided by Willis and Willis, a clear working model of task sequences that is applicable to a variety of tasks is still missing.

Teachers remain skeptical of TBLT due to the lack of a solid teaching structure. Curriculum developers strive to include tasks into curriculum by identifying task parameters and general task objectives. Even though these details are included in the overall curriculum objectives, teachers typically revert back to traditional teaching approaches that revolve around situational grammar exercises rather than classroom tasks. Teachers are unsure how to manage tasks in the classroom.
order to make this leap from conceptual to practical, there must be clear connections to the classroom.

Classroom characteristics of tasks
When considering TBLT for the classroom, there are four primary classroom characteristics of tasks for teachers to examine. These task features have a clear impact on task performance in the classroom. These four characteristics constitute a convenient starting point for educators. Teachers and researchers can and should tweak these or use these as a basis to establish other characteristics for specific classrooms or language programs.

Learner-created language
Tasks provide learners with the opportunity to create, to share and to negotiate meanings. What separates tasks from traditional teaching approaches is the fact that learners do not rely on resources such as course books or sentences on the board to produce language. That is not to say these resources can not play a role in the task process, but they should not be the primary tool driving language production.

Learners may need to see an example of the task language before completing the task. Rather than directly introducing and teaching language features, teachers can develop activities that expose learners to the language. Activities such as sequencing, observations, taking notes or a reading activity are effective in exposing learners to the target language. If errors continue to hinder task performance to the point that task failure is imminent, the teacher should intervene. Just remember that learners should not be regurgitating language from other sources.

Learner-controlled content
Some tasks require learners to draw on information from existing sources rather than create original content. Tasks such as information gaps, treasure hunts or simple sequencing usually do not make use of learner-created content. These tasks give learners a chance to filter and control the flow of information to accomplish the task. Thus, the term learner-controlled is used instead of learner-created.

This is not to say that learner-created content is not an option. It is a very worthwhile undertaking. For example, if the main task is ordering food from a fast food menu, allow learners to create the fast-food menu prior to task performance instead of using a menu directly from the course book or the Internet.

Task outcome
Educators must remember that a task must have an outcome - goals and objectives of the task. It is vital that the use of the target language not be viewed as the outcome of the task. Language is a tool that helps learners complete a task.
Skills integration

Classroom task processes promote the use of all four universal language skills. In addition to language skills, TBLT is an opportunity to infuse thinking skills into the language learning classroom. In the real world, even the most mundane everyday tasks require different levels of cognitive processing and strategies. Classroom tasks must do the same. Explicit and implicit inclusion of thinking skills and metacognitive strategies are important for all ages and levels of learners.

The task process

The task process is composed of three stages, the pre-task, the main task and the post-task. This framework is certainly not the only way in which TBLT can be implemented. Teachers can and should experiment with the framework to create their own framework that suits their own teaching styles and classrooms. However, this framework provides teachers with an invaluable classroom tool for task process implementation.

Main task

The main task is the cornerstone of the task process. There are five general parameters of tasks and task processes as a whole with which educators can tinker to adjust classroom tasks for different groups of learners. Educators and researchers can almost certainly identify other task parameters. However, these five parameters simplify the ‘rules’ that govern task performance in the classroom.

Time constraints

Time constraints on a task affect the meanings and the language that learners produce. Embedding time constraints favors a focus on fluency. As learners work through tasks, they are aware of the time constraints. Awareness of the time constraints causes learners to be more concerned with communicating what they want to say under the time limit and less cautious with the accuracy of language they produce. On the other hand, without time constraints, learners have longer to think about the language and content that they produce. This results in more accurate language as well as more accurate content. It must be noted that circumstances of the classroom rarely allow an activities to be free of time constraints. Thus, it is best to approach this task parameter on a continuum of sorts with degrees of time constraints. Let us consider very similar tasks, one with tight time constraints and looser time constraints.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task process with tight time constraints</th>
<th>Task process with loose time constraints</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners have one minute to write down words, phrases or sentences that describe their bedrooms. After one minute, learners get in pairs and use the descriptions to explain what their bedroom looks like. They have two minutes to tell their partner about their room while their partner draws their room. Their partner cannot look at the written description.</td>
<td>Learners have ten minutes to create a description of their bedroom using words, phrases or sentences. It is also acceptable for learners to sketch their rooms or use other illustrations. After ten minutes, learners get in pairs and use the original descriptions to explain what their bedroom looks like. Their partner must draw the room as they listen. Their partner cannot look at the written description.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the first task process with tight time constraints, we would expect the lists that learners create to contain single words and simple adjectives that describe their rooms. In the second example, the lists would contain a wider range of vocabulary as well as extended phrases or sentences. In addition to the lists, we would expect the drawings produced in each of the tasks to vary in terms of detail and accuracy.

Access to content
While performing a task, learners may need support in terms of task content. Learners may not have sufficient background knowledge of the topic. Perhaps important pieces of information were inadvertently omitted by the teacher for the learners to discover as they move through the task, or the learners simply do not know enough about the topic. To help learners stay on task, incorporate the use of notes, cue cards, computers or other materials into the task process.

In the previous example tasks, learners refer to their lists to describe their bedrooms. Teachers could make the task more difficult by asking learners to describe their bedrooms to their partners without referring to the lists. By adding or removing the use of the list (task content), teachers can influence task outcomes and the language produced.

Access to language
There are instances when learners need support in terms of the target language to complete a task. Providing example dialogs or sample written texts can help get the learners back on task. Do not allow access to target language throughout the entire main task. Display the target language for a short period of time at the beginning of the main task or when task performance is stalled. Remove it once the learners are once again on task. An effective way to get learners back on track is to simply provide a model of the task before task performance.

Learner interaction
This refers to the type of interaction that occurs between participants throughout the task process. Activities may be carried out through individual work, pair work, group work or whole-class work. Almost any activity can be reworked to conform to any interaction type. For example, teachers sometimes use brainstorming activities in a whole-class format. However, learners can quietly brainstorm ideas on their own before participating in a whole-class brainstorming activity. It is also possible to do the opposite; start with whole-class brainstorming followed by individual brainstorming.

By specifying the types of interaction that occur in each stage of the task process, educators are able to keep track of what the learners do in the classroom and make the necessary adjustments to guarantee that a wide range of learning styles and preferences are attended to in the classroom.

Surprise element
This task feature simply introduces new information into the main task that alters task performance. Surprise elements have not been shown to have direct effects on fluency or accuracy, but they do keep learners more motivated and focused.
In the bedroom drawing task, it is possible to apply surprise elements. After the partners have drawn half the room, they draw the remainder of the bedroom while blindfolded. Another option would be to change partners halfway through the task.

Pre-task
The pre-task aims to motivate, prepare and organize learners for the main task. There are four steps in the pre-task. However, teachers can omit, repeat or mix the steps.

Step #1: Check & build background knowledge
Prior to task performance, teachers need to assess what learners know about the task topic and the language required to complete the task. Once this has been accomplished, learners need to build upon this existing knowledge. This can be accomplished via numerous activities (Table 2).

Table 2: Activities to support task performance in pre-task and post-task stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Checking, building &amp; reinforcing background knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To measure learner knowledge of the task topic</td>
<td>● mind maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● writing lists</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● categorizing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Venn diagrams</td>
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<tr>
<td>To introduce meanings that are required during task performance</td>
<td>● flash cards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● matching</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● slideshows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To expose learners to target language without explicit focus on structures</td>
<td>● reading a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● listening to a text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● sequencing a dialog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display questions</td>
<td>These are questions that encourage learners to show what they know. Answers to display questions are right or wrong, and the teacher knows the answer before asking. An example would be showing a picture of a bear and asking learners to identify the animal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential questions</td>
<td>These questions ask learners to respond based on their own experiences, opinions or imaginations. An example would be showing a picture of a bear and asking learners if they are scared of bears. Referential questions do require learners to demonstrate knowledge, but each learner offers a unique response.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers should not lecture on specific grammar points in the pre-task. By simply using the target language to talk about the topic and encourage a structured discussion, teachers can observe the extent of language knowledge and competence as well as topical knowledge that learners possess.

We can easily fit activities aimed at checking and building background knowledge into the bedroom drawing task. The teacher can simply lead a whole-class brainstorm session on the blackboard. Learners call out words that describe their rooms. The teacher writes the words on the board or invites learners to write them on the board. While this is going on, the teacher can ask easy referential questions about their rooms using the target language.
**Step #2: Task model**

A task model refers to demonstrating the task steps, not demonstrating the target language. This means providing a task model from beginning to end. Through the task model, learners will hear or read the target language, but the emphasis of the task model is on how to complete the task. Teachers have at their disposal two options:

- Through **passive modeling**, learners simply watch and listen as the main task is demonstrated. They are not engaged by the teacher or other learners. They are purely in receptive mode.
- **Active modeling** gives the learners a chance to discuss different aspects of the main task while the model is being demonstrated. Learners can comment on or ask questions while they are watching the task model. Tools available to the teacher during active modeling include display questions, handouts for the learners to complete while observing the task, or the learners can just take notes about the language or details they notice.

**Step #3: Task instructions**

This seems like a fairly obvious task process step. However, there are situations when a group of learners are familiar with the given task process. In these instances, task instructions may not be necessary. This can occur when learners repeat a task. Outside of task repetition, there will be few instances when teachers can forego task instructions.

**Step #4: Task planning**

Once learners are familiar with the task steps, they plan for task performance. Learners can **plan task content** by building on pre-task steps #1 and #2. Content that learners create in pre-task planning will be used to help them complete the main task. The activities listed in Table 2 are applicable at this step.

Learners can also **plan for language**. Encouraging learners to write in complete sentences while planning task content is a good way to stimulate language use. Teachers should not focus on teaching the target structures or specific grammar points but rather guide their utterances.

Returning to the drawing task, the act of making a list or writing a description of their bedrooms constitutes planning task content. Teachers can influence the language that is produced in this planning stage by encouraging the learners to write in complete sentences or to use correct spelling. This makes learners aware of language features they can use during task performance.

**Post-task**

The post-task brings the task process to a close. Teachers have at their disposal four options. The combination and sequence in which teachers implement post-task options depend on learner needs and appropriateness within the task process.

**Task reflection**

Reflecting on the task allows learners to think about what was learned, heard or said during the main task. The activities listed in Table 2 can be used to reflect on task performance. For example, if the main task requires group interaction, learners must remember what they learned about their
group members from that interaction. Typically, task reflection focuses on content from the main task, but reflecting on the language used in the main task is beneficial to acquisition. Learners can write down questions they asked, questions they were asked or the responses to the questions from the main task. Doing this gives the learners a chance to process the language that was produced and employ self-correction strategies.

**Learner errors**

Errors made during task performance can be used to focus on target language in the post-task. To do this, teachers should actively record incorrect utterances produced during task performance. Teachers can use audio/video recordings or simply take notes of learner language as learners work through the main task. One easy approach is to make a list of ten errors that learners make during task performance and correct them as a class. Another option is to create a handout with the errors, and the learners correct the errors.

**Drills & exercises**

Some teachers, learners and schools are more comfortable with treating target structures in a more traditional approach. In the TBLT task process, the post-task is the appropriate stage to focus on target structures in an explicit manner or use drills to practice the language. Examples of activities that fall under this post-task option are:

- word substitution
- unscrambling sentences & words
- conjugating
- fill-in-the-blanks
- listen & repeat
- answering with picture prompts

While drills and exercises make it easy for the teacher to manage the classroom and reinforce the target language, they lack context. These activities involve only surface-level cognitive strategies. This post-task option is often combined with one or two of the other options.

Post-task options can be combined to close out the bedroom drawing task process. Learner pairs compare the drawings of their bedrooms with their actual bedrooms and make corrections (task reflection). Then, the class hangs their drawings on the walls creating a ‘museum’ for the learners to walk around and talk about the drawings (task reflection) through simple dialogs. After reflecting on the task, the teacher makes sentences using the target language about one of the pictures on the wall. The learners listen, run to the corresponding picture and repeat the sentence that the teacher said (drills & exercises).

**Repeat performance**

Another option available to teachers in the post-task is a repeat performance of the main task. Learners simply carry out the task again. The idea behind this option is that repeating the task will help the learners notice and correct errors they committed in the first task completion. Teachers may need to draw learners’ attention to some of the errors they made in the main task prior to undertaking a repeat performance to increase their awareness of the language they produce in the repeat performance.
In a repeat performance, task parameters can be modified or remain as they were. Changing the interaction type from pair work to group work or doing the task in front of the class are ways to alter task parameters.

Task process objectives
As with any lesson plan, regardless of the teaching approach, clear objectives are a necessity. Determining the functional objectives, the linguistic objectives, the cognitive objectives and the content objectives within each task process should be one of the initial steps in the development process.

Table 3: Task process objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective Types</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Task Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Connects the classroom task to a real world activity</td>
<td>Providing accurate descriptions of non-immediate places or situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>States the language skills, structures, vocabulary and other linguistic features that are associated with the task</td>
<td>Bedroom furniture vocabulary, Adjectives used to describe bedrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Skills</td>
<td>Identifies, from a practical perspective, the thinking skills which learners use to process content throughout the task process</td>
<td>Determine necessary information, Clear communication of facts, Assess accuracy of drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>States the resources such as book pages, handout titles or content around which the task process revolves</td>
<td>Bedrooms at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues to consider
As with all teaching approaches, there are caveats to the TBLT framework in this paper. Discussed below are a few issues that may arise with implementing this framework. Some of these issues are not new to the TBLT debate. However, they are revisited to add a different perspective.

Micro-management
While previous research on TBLT centered on macro- and meso-curriculum levels, this framework focuses on individual lesson plans. Before adapting a task-based approach, language program coordinators and teachers must devote a significant amount of time to identifying task domains, target language domains, type tasks and task parameters (Van der Brander, 2006). Simply using the framework in this paper a few times a month in a classroom does not constitute a task-based classroom. However, the framework moves the discussion from a conceptual perspective to the actual performance of the tasks in the classroom.
Language deficiency
Many educators are skeptical of TBLT and the ability of learners to successfully navigate tasks without first being taught target language in an explicit manner. To combat this deficiency, teachers can employ task-supporting activities. These are different from what Ellis (2003) identifies as ‘task-supported activities.’ Often the traditional situational grammar exercises become the focus of classrooms, and tasks are pushed into a supporting role. Thus the traditional activities are supported by the tasks. It cannot be ignored that there are teachers and groups of learners that may struggle with a complete metamorphosis of their classroom away from traditional methodologies. To aid the transition, task-supporting activities are an option. Teachers can use traditional methods in a preceding class period to prepare the learners for the linguistic demands of the task processes in following class periods. Teachers must be careful to not let the task-supporting activities overpower the use of task processes. If this is the case, the curriculum and classroom are no longer task-based.

Institutional expectations and philosophies
A common concern often expressed by teachers is that schools or institutes do not allow task-based classrooms. Certainly, the teacher must conform to a degree to meet institutional demands. However, the task process outlined in this paper is easily adaptable within most teaching contexts. This paper is not arguing that schools, curriculum developers and teachers should leave other methodologies and permanently convert to TBLT. The framework was developed in a manner that allows it to be adapted into any classroom, textbook or syllabus without forcing a complete restructuring of the curriculum.

Task appropriateness
Learner characteristics such as age, proficiency levels and class size among others directly affect the types of tasks that teachers can use in the classroom. Activities that are chosen as tasks for one group of learners may be useful as a pre-task activity for another group of learners. Young learners need tasks aimed at informational processing skills such as compare and contrast or classifying. However, adolescent or adult learners can employ these types of activities in the pre-task to build on background knowledge.

Teachers must carefully consider the sequence and interaction types that are utilized in the task process. In young learner classrooms, often a sequencing activity is conducted as a whole-class activity in the pre-task followed by the same or a similar sequencing activity in pairs during the main task. However, for older learners, a more cognitively challenging activity may be appropriate in the main task.

Time management
Organizing the entire task process into a single class period may not necessarily be feasible for certain tasks. It is certainly possible to develop a task process that spans multiple class periods. Teachers should not force learners to rush through all the steps just to complete the task in one class period. An integral part of TBLT is that learners can move through the process at a rate that is suitable for their own learning strategies and preferences. The TBLT framework in this paper is designed to provide natural stopping points throughout the process. Teachers can split the process
into three class periods - one class period per stage in the process. There are numerous ways to do this. However, it is important to ensure that learners are not forced to stop in the middle of an activity.

**Focusing on language last**

This aspect of TBLT has been extensively discussed in research and teaching textbooks. One argument for focusing on language first that has not received as much attention as it deserves is that of risk-taking in the classroom. If a teacher focuses on structures or drills at the beginning of the task process, learners will limit their utterances to those specific structures. Learners will treat activities as opportunities to drill and practice the structures as opposed to communicating genuine meanings. Risk-taking and creativity should be encouraged (Dörnyei, 2001) during task processes. This can be accomplished by creating an environment where errors and mistakes are acceptable during task performance. Teachers can use the post-task as an opportunity to ‘clean up’ errors from the main task.

**Conclusion**

There are many obstacles facing TBLT in the language learning classrooms, and the framework presented in this paper will not solve them all. However, it does provide teachers with a solid foundation from which to begin working TBLT into their classrooms. It must be emphasized that teachers should not see this framework as the sole classroom approach to TBLT. Teachers should refer to all the resources that are available. Mixing and matching different options allows teachers to find the right combination for a particular task for a particular group of learners. Certainly more research is required to determine which aspects of this framework need to be adjusted. Participant roles, corrective feedback strategies, balancing meaning and forms and infusing the learning process with thinking skills are areas that require more research.


