English for Jobs: A Task-Based Curriculum for Adult Refugee English Learners

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ABSTRACT

Materials and resources available to ESL teachers for adult immigrant and refugee populations in the United States reveal a lack of relevant instructional guidelines in meeting specific language learner needs within this context. In particular, refugees who are resettled in the United States each year must find employment within the first few months in order to financially support their families and establish themselves as functioning members of their new communities. A majority of resettlement agencies and local English language programs have yet to determine a consistent and coherent ESL curriculum that addresses the learner needs for vocational training coupled with appropriate English language instruction for refugees. In this work, an ESL curriculum is presented that focuses on a task-based approach to language learning whereby refugees enrolled in a beginner ESL class learn through a series of authentic tasks related to their future professions and community life. This curriculum addresses specific instructional guidelines and reflects a practical approach to language teaching as it encourages learner interaction through the completion of tasks. In developing this task-based curriculum, language teachers for this particular learner population can adapt the materials provided in their classrooms and use them as a model for English language instruction.
Introduction

According to the World Refugee Survey (United States Committee of Refugees and Immigrants, 2007), approximately 12 million people around the world maintain the status of refugee or asylum seeker. Since establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1950, the United States has continued to allow those seeking refuge and asylum from political and religious persecution in their native countries the opportunity to live in a safer environment. In recent years the rate of migration of peoples from around the world into the United States has experienced a significant increase (United States High Commissioner of Refugees, 2007). More specifically, those entering the country under refugee status encompass a growing number of the immigrant population. According to the USHCR, each year refugee families from every continent enter the United States to relocate in various parts of the country through the support of government funded resettlement agencies. For refugees, this process of adapting to new surroundings begins with government assistance for the first three months that pays for room and board, medical care, and other basic needs that arise. Since most financial assistance is temporary, upon arrival into the United States those eligible for job placement must actively seek employment in order to support their families on a permanent basis.

Refugee resettlement agencies often provide various programs for their clients in order to aid the process of negotiating their new roles in American culture. English classes are often provided in order for refugees to learn enough English to communicate on the job and in the community. Some agencies have established a work incentive program that requires clients to attend English classes while they look for jobs. If the client fulfills this requirement by attending classes, the agency will provide additional financial support through grant programs and private donations. Thus, the motivation for refugees in learning English as a second or additional language is influenced by a need for basic communication in the new culture, specifically within
the workplace environment, and also as a means for receiving temporary financial support until employment is obtained.

In recognizing the immediate need for an English program specific to the learning requirements of the refugee population in the United States, an instructional language curriculum is necessary for survival in daily interactions at work and in the community. As financial assistance is temporary, refugees must find employment soon after they arrive. Their success in finding employment often hinges on their abilities to communicate in English, such as in the context of job interviews and filling out job applications. Therefore, the intensive learning that must take place for this specific group of language learners within this context calls for an instructional language curriculum tailored to immediate needs of the refugees.

The purpose of this work is to describe a task-based curriculum that accommodates the learning needs of a specific population of adult refugees that will aid in their adaptation to community and the workplace in the United States. This curriculum is structured around the task-based approach to teaching and details specific guidelines, methods, and lesson practices to be used and adapted for ESL classrooms in similar contexts. As there remains an overall lack of current resources that address specific language learning needs of refugee populations entering the United States, this curriculum is a necessary component for refugees as they negotiate their new American community. It provides authentic learning tasks that address the language interactions that refugees will face in their every-day relations in the community and workplace environments and will equip them with linguistic knowledge in order to appropriately participate in those interactions.
Conceptual Underpinnings

The language needs of refugees learning ESL at this specific point in time in the United States highlight specific principles in language teaching for this particular group of people. According to Segal & Mayadas (2005), the socioeconomic status of refugees as they leave their homeland and the extent of exposure to Western social and cultural concepts will have an enormous impact on their integration into American life. Resources afforded to this group for social, economic, and cultural integration relate closely to literacy (in both the native and target language) and gaining English proficiency. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) state that language proficiency can be seen as the “ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, school, and work situations required for daily living in a given society” (p. 34). The development of relevant learning environments which address this concept is crucial for learners’ overall success in various social contexts.

Although each learner arrives from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, they are united by a desire to learn English for obtaining jobs and functioning in their new community. At the same time, their diverse backgrounds and learning styles must be recognized, celebrated, and utilized to develop an appropriate curriculum which will not only meet immediate linguistic needs, but will also be sensitive to other factors related to the social and cultural diversity present in the ESL classroom. Richards and Lockhart (1996) point out that various learning styles related to cognition, such as concrete, analytical, communicative, and authority-oriented, affect how learners “conceptualize learning and the way they interpret learning within the classroom context” (p. 58). They also mention that differences in cultural background often have an effect on cognitive learning style depending on ethnicity. However individual learning patterns and preferred teaching approaches must be recognized in order to adapt instructional materials appropriately.
Given the goals and objectives for this course, and the diverse social, cultural, cognitive learning backgrounds of learners, the instructor must realize that the interconnectedness of language and culture will affect the curriculum design when tailoring it to the needs of the various groups represented. Whenever possible, Murphy & Byrd (2004) suggest that placing an emphasis on the diversity represented in the classroom and coordinating awareness, respect, and tolerance of the many cultural systems will maximize the potential for learning on a complex level in this environment. They conclude that instructors must also be prepared to “shift gears in response to unplanned events” in order to take full advantage of opportunities that promote meaningful learning (p.25). The goals and expectations of this refugee group must also be evaluated to ensure that they are realistic in nature and that they display a willingness to adapt given the opportunities and resources made available to them (Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

Dalton and Tharp (2002), maintain that the process of learning and development occurs through meaningful activities within a social and cultural context. They also point out that this idea is most effective through community participation and within the context of building relationships. The knowledge and experience that each learner brings to the classroom will affect the development of language learning (Murphy & Byrd, 2004). Therefore, the fostering of second language acquisition takes place as a result of natural interaction with the language through meaningful communication among peers and comprehensible input by the instructor (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Drawing meaningful learning from authentic tasks associated with work-place competencies will give learners more opportunities to engage in communicative activities with the instructor and peers. In addition, the structure of this course focuses on competency in the target language rather than mastery. For adults, “complete mastery of a new language may be impossible” (Murphy & Byrd, 2004, p.24). Therefore, instruction should strive
to meet realistic goals of comprehensible speech and interaction rather than unattainable native-like expectations.

The language instructor must also provide on-going evaluation of the program in order to improve various aspects of the course curriculum. Learners are encouraged to offer feedback about their learning experiences in the classroom and what they view as beneficial to their learning of English. After employment is obtained, an on-the-job evaluation of learner competency may also be appropriate. This process of evaluation gives opportunities for learners to take part in curriculum design and also in receiving feedback from others, thus promoting successful development and progress of second language competencies (Murphy & Byrd, 2004).

**Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

Given the similar needs for community and work-place competencies of these ESL learners and the intensive nature of the course, a task-based approach to instruction and interaction has been developed to increase target language acquisition in a short amount of time. Tasks often act as building blocks to second language acquisition as learners develop cognitive skills in acquiring appropriate language to process information and apply it (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, rather than relying exclusively on meaningful input from the teacher, TBLT can help activate learning processes which require learners to negotiate meaning through engaging in natural communication. This approach is often combined or developed from the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT, Brown, 2001), an instructional approach that provides for meaningful communication and fluency building within the classroom. Richards & Rodgers (p. 223) describe values of CLT which relate to aspects of TBLT:
Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning.
Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.
Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

They also point out typical components within a task-based curriculum syllabus include categories such as (p. 223):

- language structures
- functions
- topics and themes
- marco-skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking)
- competencies
- text types
- vocabulary targets

The process of incorporating meaningful tasks with real communication fosters a useful approach to curriculum development for this particular group of learners. Bushell & Dyer (1994) note that “task based learning provides a purpose for the use of language other than just learning language items for their own sake” (p.155). Therefore, the curriculum is centered on specific tasks that learners must complete for overall success not only in the classroom but in real-world contexts. Learners will be constantly challenged to learn and apply new concepts and skills that will lead to target language acquisition for practical use in vocational training and community involvement.

Although there are many benefits to task-based instruction, critics note the restrictive nature of task development that allows for only teacher interpretation of learner needs and limits individual learner contribution to material development (Skehan, 1995). Skehan also observes that learners may also desire a focus on form at times rather than simply meaning and may use various types of comprehension strategies to recover meaning other than through task-based learning. Additionally, task-based language components are often difficult to define and usually draw from other methods and approaches. Skehan claims that this can lead to the use of strong
and weak forms of task-based approaches that may be confusing to teachers who desire to use a more specific type of method. Cognitive and affective styles of learners, along with language proficiency, will aid teachers in determining the amount and appropriateness of task-based instruction required in the classroom context.

However, many advantages to task-based language instruction exist that offer relevant learning experiences in the language classroom if administered in appropriate ways and contexts. One benefit of having learners from various ethnic, cognitive, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds is that they can learn from each other by interacting and collaborating on a regular basis through task-based instruction. Some learners may have to adapt to this type of instructional style and have to change long held paradigms of what language teaching and learning entails. For example, as TBLT often promotes learner collaboration in small groups, learners who are used to whole group/individual work must make some adjustments (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Students need to be familiarized with the nature of TBLT as it reflects the concept of learning as a process rather than a means to an end in attaining specific content and skills. Therefore, the teacher should also explain the underlying principles behind the task-centered curriculum and promote the necessity of acquiring basic skills, structures, and competencies required of learners in their communities and future professions. Both student and teacher must familiarize themselves with various types of learning styles and principles which may differ from their own learning backgrounds.

The range of cultural and linguistic diversity common in refugee ESL classrooms makes TBLT instruction all the more pertinent to immediate learning needs for all learners. In the following study, a typical ESL classroom experience is described which highlights the adaptation of a task-based curriculum to a specific group of adult refugees. By providing a framework of task-based instruction for this population, teachers in similar contexts will be able to benefit from
this resource as it is can be adapted to their classrooms. This study, following a format similar to Murphy & Byrd’s (2001) collection of authentic classroom descriptions entitled *Understanding the Courses We Teach*, focuses on an adult ESL class and details a specific teaching and learning environment. The following section details the classroom context, goals and objectives, teacher and learner roles, modes of assessment, syllabus design, and examples of activity types.

**Setting**

The location for this ESL class is a refugee resettlement agency near Atlanta, Georgia. Each student in the class has been assigned to this particular agency as it aids refugees and their families in finding housing, schools for their children, employment, and other government services available upon their arrival to the United States. Within the agency’s office the teacher has access to a room specifically designated for an ESL classroom. The teacher can display posters, pictures, and other materials on the walls as desired. There are two dry-erase boards and various shelves and cabinets in the classroom with students’ desks arranged in a U-shape facing the boards. The students have access to dictionaries and workbooks during class time (although classroom sets of materials are incomplete) as well as having notebooks and writing utensils provided by the agency for the duration of the course. The duration of the course is eight weeks with students attending class three days per week for three hours (9 classroom hours per week).

This course focuses on learning survival and job-related English skills which students must acquire in order to obtain work within the first four months of living in the United States. It is a free course offered to all new arrivals which requires an initial placement interview before beginning the course. The resettlement agency offers a work-incentive grant program which provides financial aid to refugee families and gives students motivation for attending class on a regular basis prior to obtaining employment. In order for students to be eligible to receive
financial aid from this program, they must attend class three times a week for three and a half hours a day. They must also have the teacher sign a document which records their attendance in class each day.

The students attending this particular ESL class are all adult refugees ranging in ages of 23-56. They have recently arrived to the United States after fleeing their home country for reasons of political, religious, or ethnic persecution. The class is comprised of students representing various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds---four Vietnamese, three Karen Burmese, three Somali, one Meskhetian Turk, and three Cubans. The majority of students had arrived to the United States from a week to one month prior to the start of the class. These 14 students are starting on the beginner level determined after an informal oral and written pre-assessment was conducted before the course (Appendix C). They are all literate in their native language with some having attended secondary school in their home country or in a refugee camp. Some are multilingual as they have learned to speak the lingua franca of their host countries (usually in a refugee camp or in a country of asylum) prior to arriving to the United States.

**Goals/Objectives**

The main purpose of this course is for learners to achieve a level of English proficiency that will allow them to obtain employment in the Atlanta area. In order to support their families, learners must learn how to get a job they can depend on for income which will meet their immediate financial needs. Therefore, this ESL class is focused on students learning vocational English appropriate in the workplace, as well as basic English useful for survival and everyday use in their communities. As new arrivals to the United States with no long-term financial aid, students must begin the process of seeking employment in a short amount of time. Consequently, a small window of time is available to them for learning English upon their arrival.
which increases cognitive and linguistic demands placed upon learners. By examining the backgrounds and needs of the students, the instructor realizes the relevance of this specific type of English to their lives and its immediate, real-life applications.

This course will focus on work-related English skills as well as practical life skills which relate to various types of employment possibilities for these students. The overall goals are for students to reach the Intermediate-Mid level in reading, speaking, and writing. To meet these objectives, they will be exposed to meaningful vocabulary, language patterns typical in American speech, and cultural issues relevant to their workplace situations. For example, in order to prepare learners for the workplace, it is crucial that they be able to understand and follow simple directions, fill out applications for employment and timecards, be able to interact with co-workers and supervisors, and understand etiquette in the workplace. By the end of this course, students will have developed intrapersonal skills by becoming capable of understanding simple workplace requests and be able to communicate with co-workers and neighbors with understandable statements.

The focus of this course relates to competencies in the workplace and community environment rather than mastery of specific linguistic forms. Each week is organized around a theme, building on what has been covered in previous weeks. This task-based curriculum includes various survival-skill tasks such as healthcare and financial issues along with workplace subjects such as finding a job and boss/co-worker relations. These types of subject matter are interrelated and will equip learners with knowledge they can apply to daily interactions both in the community and the workplace. Recycling of material is a common practice, as students must be exposed to vocabulary and concepts numerous times and on a continual basis.

The curriculum is constructed on the premise that students need to learn certain skills, such as responding to client requests or complaints, in order to be successful in the workplace.
This goal will also include students’ own desires in learning English and what they want to learn for success in daily interactions, such as opening a checking account or making a doctor’s appointment. By providing them with authentic learning experiences which they can apply to their daily lives, this will help promote an effective way of learning English relevant to the workplace and community context.

**Teacher Roles**

The teacher’s responsibilities to learners in this type of setting include providing relevant materials and resources related to the workplace and community, fostering connections with job counselors and employment agencies, incorporating survival and vocational skill tasks into everyday activities, and facilitating interactions between peers through interactive activities. Within the English for jobs course context at the refugee resettlement agency, responsibility for the overall organization of curriculum materials and instruction has been given to the current ESL instructor. Given the limited budget for ESL, the agency cannot provide specific textbook or workbook resources for each learner at this time. Therefore, it is the instructor’s duty to determine what available materials are appropriate in organizing the themes, activities, and assessments for the class. In the past, various workbooks and materials related to vocational training and learning English as a second language have been used in teaching the same type of curriculum, and many of these resources have been set aside for future use.

Along with determining appropriate curriculum materials for learners, the instructor works with job developers and counselors who focus on job placement for adult refugee clients who are currently enrolled in the ESL class. As these refugees are required to find employment within their first three months of living in the United States, the available resources provided by the agency’s job developers is crucial in order for refugees to obtain employment. The instructor
works closely with his or her colleagues in determining the most optimal and appropriate employment sites for refugees, given their employment background and level of English proficiency. Additionally, instructors keep job developers, counselors, and other agency staff informed of learner issues such as cultural background, literacy level, and aspects of language acquisition which could affect learner performance in the workplace.

A major goal for the instructor in teaching ESL for jobs is to equip learners with language they will need to perform vocational tasks in the workplace. She provides learners with authentic and comprehensible input such as relevant vocabulary for survival and function in the workplace and instructions on safety procedures and work-related tasks. In addition, appropriate feedback provided by the instructor to learners will also help eliminate errors in language usage as they are adapting to new surroundings and learning to function in their communities.

The instructor also acts as a classroom facilitator and monitor as she oversees interactive activity through pair and group work. She also demonstrates and models task-related activities and role plays which may initially seem like abstract concepts to beginners. Often procedures for such activities must be explicitly taught, and the instructor must also ensure that all learners are engaged and encourage them to participate in the interactive activities. At the same time, she provides rationale for curriculum selections and is able to reinforce the importance of learning work-related tasks, such as appropriate on-the-job interactions with co-workers and employers, during classroom time so learners will be prepared for future employment. She also keeps track of classroom attendance as required by state law, and emphasizes the need for regular attendance in order for learners to receive monetary government assistance.

Furthermore, the instructor allows opportunities for learner input and feedback about the relevance of course materials and activities to their daily lives. Flexibility with instructional tasks is also required as issues arise, such as frequent doctor’s appointments or job interviews,
and the needs of learners may vary from day to day. These issues must be addressed by the instructor and, whenever possible, incorporated into the learning environment through active discussion of task selection and reasons for their inclusion into the curriculum.

**Learner Roles**

Before obtaining employment, learners in the ESL for jobs class are required to attend the class on a regular basis for the first three or four months of living in the United States. This obligation meets the standards as required by the local county’s Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). According to DFCS, in order to obtain government assistance in paying for rent, food stamps, and other material necessities, refugees must be enrolled in an English program for the period they are without employment. They must also prove that they are actively seeking employment within their means. Therefore, some reasons for learners to attend ESL class are extrinsically motivating in nature.

However, many learners are intrinsically motivated to learn English in order to interact with neighbors and other members of their communities. Their desire is to obtain a higher proficiency of English in order to obtain good employment and function in society. With this high rate of motivation, it will enable them to take an active role in the learning process as they collaborate with peers and the instructor. A primary concern for learners in this ESL context is to seek out ways to interact with the instructor and classmates in order to increase language proficiency related to vocational and societal circumstances. Through the incorporation of interactive, task-based activities in the classroom, learners will utilize the time they are given to improve their communication skills in order to prepare for encounters outside the classroom.

Given the diverse cultural and language backgrounds represented in the class, learners are also expected to share their life experiences in a meaningful way. Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti
(2005) recognize learner’s funds of knowledge, or skills and interests that make them experts in a
given area, which can be uncovered and celebrated within the context of classroom interaction
and can be employed in real-life experiences and relational interactions. Skills such as
construction work, experience in raising children, or expertise related to various other
professions should be acknowledged so learners can identify for themselves their qualifications
to work in the United States as well as expand on possible job opportunities in the future. In
addition, this enables learners to recognize themselves as competent, contributing members of
their new society.

To aid in this process of discovery, learners are given tasks in class which encourage
them to share information about their backgrounds whether it is through oral communication or
written assignments. They are also encouraged to communicate in any way they can, therefore
the use of native language is supported if it helps assist peers in communicating their ideas
effectively. More advanced learners are also given opportunities to support and assist others in
classroom activities. This will also aid in the overall learning experience for all participants by
encouraging learners to offer peer feedback when necessary. As a result, a sense of community
will be established among learners which will hopefully carry over to their relationships and
interactions outside the classroom, whether on the job on in the community.

**Assessment**

Students are initially given an intake interview that includes listening and responding to
basic questions about their background (Appendix C). Along with the oral assessment, students
are asked to provide a written sample (alphabet, name, address, etc.) and to read aloud from a
teacher-generated worksheet (a progression of letters, numbers, time, sentences). This intake
session gives the teacher a better idea of students’ proficiency levels and how to tailor lesson plans accordingly.

Throughout the course, authentic assessments, such as oral or written responses to material covered in the previous day’s lesson and review items given at the beginning or ending of class, are conducted on a regular basis to measure the progression of students’ language proficiency throughout the course. Given that this is a beginner level class, much improvement and progression should be observed by the end of the course.

At the conclusion of the course, various types of assessments are used to measure students’ performance and progress. As the primary goal of this course is to prepare students for assimilation into the American workforce, a mock job interview with each student is administered within the last few weeks in order to measure how she or he responds to typical interview questions that involve sharing much of what they learned during the course. Students’ performance on the interview will be measured using a teacher-generated rubric. Additionally, portions of the literacy test of the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) provided by the Center of Applied Linguistics (1989) are administered the last week of class to measure reading and writing proficiency (Appendix D). BEST reflects an overall tangible assessment of various tasks included in the curriculum and is also a free resource provided by the resettlement agency. As far as standards of the hosting refugee resettlement agency are concerned, overall success in this class will be based upon whether students can find and maintain a place of employment after completing this course. The resettlement agency’s job developer is responsible for informing staff about refugee employment and frequently communicating with caseworkers and the ESL teacher about employment statuses of refugee clients.
Syllabus Design

The English for Jobs course focuses on task-centered instruction with goals that will meet the language needs of the ESL learners in this program who are seeking immediate employment. This course will be taught with an 8-week period, three days a week, three and a half hours a day. Because of the short-term, intensive nature of the course, the syllabus is designed to target specific aspects of vocational and survival English within a short time frame. It offers a series of topics that are organized around themes predetermined by the teacher. Within these topics, relevant tasks which relate to the themes are detailed in each section. As Skehan (1995) points out, it is imperative that tasks be arranged in a principled fashion that reflects a focus on necessary concepts that learners need to master. Therefore, the syllabus elements are determined after close observation, inquiry, and reflection of refugee resettlement within the first three months in the United States. As an employee—both as an English teacher and caseworker---of this particular resettlement agency, I have observed and personally guided many refugee families in the process of resettlement and understand many of their immediate needs upon arrival. Therefore, the topics related to tasks included in the course design reflect the needs of refugee ESL learners and their families during this crucial time of adaptation. However, within this task-based structure, learners are also invited to make contributions and offer feedback related to the topics being covered. With instructional support, they are also challenged to explore topics of their own which are relevant to their daily lives and future professions.

This course begins much like other types of basic ESL courses, as these learners have had little or no prior experience in learning English as a second or additional language. Therefore, the themes presented each week build upon each other as the course progresses. The first part of the course (first four weeks) will focus on basic survival English and communicative skills with learners’ communities, while the second part will target vocational skills needed for
communicative competency and success and in the workplace. The following table, organized as an advance organizer, gives a detailed description of the themes, topics, and task samples offered within the 8-week course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identity/Family Background</td>
<td>-Personal Information (name, address, native country)</td>
<td>Write your address and telephone number, speak about your family, native country</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Family, Relationships</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Health/Personal Safety</td>
<td>-Emergency situations</td>
<td>Call 911, determine emergency contact information, explain medical problems</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Scheduling doctor’s appointments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Types of illnesses, injuries</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>-Reading a calendar</td>
<td>Make a calendar with important dates/holidays</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Telling time</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Personal Finance/Money</td>
<td>-US money identification</td>
<td>Fill out a check/money order, read an electric bill, check your account balance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-Types of payment in the US</td>
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<td>-How to open a checking account</td>
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<td>-How to pay bills</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Work Experience/Education/Skills</td>
<td>-Types of jobs</td>
<td>Identify previous job experience, education, and skills and write a resume</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-“What did I do?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-“Where and when did I study?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-“What can I do?”</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Job Search</td>
<td>-Employment opportunities in the US, salaries, time schedules</td>
<td>-Fill out a job application</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Job applications</td>
<td>-Participate in a job interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Job interviews-etiquette</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Workplace etiquette/Hygiene/Safety</td>
<td>-Appropriate workplace relations with boss/co-workers</td>
<td>-Identify appropriate dress, relationships/emotions with co-workers/boss</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Proper workplace attire</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Work schedules</td>
<td>-Time management on the job</td>
<td>-Call in sick</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Overtime/vacation/days off</td>
<td>-Determine how to “clock-in/out”</td>
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**Instructional Materials**

As the resettlement agency provides little resources for the ESL classroom, many materials have been locally developed to tailor to learner and draw from a wide range of sources. Some materials are taken from previous instructional items that relate to vocational English themes such as excerpts from textbooks and accompanying workbooks in *Working In English: Beginning Language Skills for the World of Work* (Brems, 1991), *English In Action* (Foley & Neblett, 2003). Each of these texts includes theme-based units with accompanying practice and interactive activities related to employment and survival English. Supplemental activities are also drawn from *The Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary Literacy Program* with accompanying picture charts and dictionaries for student use (Templin-Imel & Boyd, 1996). *The Longman ESL Literacy* student workbook (Nishio, 1998) includes activities for pre-literate and novice levels of English proficiency. Classroom sets of the above materials are not available, so the teacher must make copies of these resources for each student. Authentic items such as sample paychecks and stubs from employers (Appendix E), want-ads from newspapers (Appendix F), job applications from various employment agencies (Appendix G), and doctor’s appointment cards (Appendix H) are also incorporated into daily instructional plans.

**Activity Types**

As active participants in this course, the class will be exposed to learner-centered tasks emphasizing functionality in the workplace and community. These specific tasks also incorporate aspects of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the aims of the CLT approach utilizes the four language skills while providing a bridge between the functional and structural aspects of language. Given that much of the workplace experience involves cooperation and constant interaction with co-
workers, portions of ESL class time are dedicated to communicative activities among classmates and teacher as they work together to complete survival and workplace-related tasks. In essence, students are learning to communicate English authentically in order to apply it to everyday use as opposed to simply studying structural aspects of language.

Some instructional strategies involve mini-lectures by the teacher on predetermined themes which include follow-up guided practice activities related to the material presented. Often these activities include responses to a reading, completion of handouts, or dictation to other students. As lessons are not centered on the teaching of grammatical forms explicitly, the teacher uses student-produced speech or discourse to emphasize structural forms in a lesson. Pair work and group work collaborations will be emphasized, which allow for the most optimal use of time as it gives all students more time to communicate with their peers as opposed to individual presentations or lecture-style communication (see Appendix B for a sample lesson plan). The incorporation of pair and group work will involve problem-solving situations that students will face in on-the-job interactions and in everyday life. The collaborative learning aspect of these activities requires that students accomplish their tasks with other students (see the telephone number activity in Appendix I), while the teacher plays the role of facilitator, observer and feedback provider.

The nature of activities included in this curriculum reflects a progression as each lesson builds on previous themes. For example, a lesson on time management at work could build upon previous lessons on how to read a calendar and tell time to make important appointments. As the structure of this curriculum focuses on a new theme each week, material will not only be built upon but constantly recycled so students will receive a maximum amount of exposure to relevant language use. The use of authentic materials, such as job applications, newspaper
advertisements, and doctor’s appointment cards will help promote needed workplace skills as well as make learning relevant to students’ daily life experiences and their future professions.

Discussion

For refugee students who have faced severe trauma in their lives, it may seem initially difficult for teachers to relate to their situations and plight as a specific type of immigrant in the United States. As opposed to coming to the United States voluntarily, most refugees have been pushed from their homelands and have suffered much degradation and persecution before arriving in America (Segal and Mayadas, 2005). Therefore, when approaching curriculum unit and individual lesson planning, it is important to be flexible according to the needs and backgrounds of this diverse group of people. While important to maintain standards and objectives for learners, teachers cannot overlook issues which may arise in the home or situations which require immediate attention. This type of classroom context often requires teachers to deviate from traditional ideas about language teaching and reevaluate the instructional approaches they use. Teacher roles often shift as the physical and emotional needs of learners continue to change during their adaptation process in the United States. By sharing with students in the difficult as well as the joyful times, the teacher will help build a sense of community and connection between school and home.

Despite my prior experience in working with refugees, this was my first time working on such intensely diverse levels with one group of adults. Many people regard the process of cultural adaptation as a bottom-up procedure, but one tends to forget the psychological and cultural baggage that a refugee brings to the United States. Depending on the person and circumstances of their leaving, one can assume the typical pattern of adjustment in a particular situation. However, hidden affective factors cannot always be addressed at a particular time and
language instructors must be ever vigilant in noticing these below-the-surface attitudes and act accordingly. In dealing with the emotional state of people who have seen and experienced much trauma or oppression, it is too difficult to measure the adaptation/assimilation process in a linear fashion. Within this context, I had to change some preconceived ideas relating to my expectations of appropriate interactions with this type of immigrant population. I realized that my identity as a white, middle-class female had to be recognized and renegotiated according to the social, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds of my students. By being conscious of my shifting paradigms and recognition of my new identity as not only instructional teacher, but facilitator, job counselor, and overall resource person, this played a significant role in my instructional planning and interaction with my students.

Additionally, by observing and asking questions about inherent knowledge to each ethnic group, I was able to better plan my lessons according to both their needs and interests. Within various teaching and learning contexts, there needs to be a transformation in the way pedagogical practices are implemented for English language learners, emphasizing a critical approach to traditional pedagogical methods (Pennycook, 1999). He states that critically thinking about pedagogical issues involves “a way of thinking that pushes one constantly to question rather than to pontificate” (p.343). Without a critical perspective in deciphering the reasons for using these methods, educators and linguistic theorists fail to recognize possible discrepancies in their language teaching. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out, specific methods may be helpful for the novice teacher, help solve the problem of making basic decisions in teaching, and provide various activity resources. However, with the changing cultural, racial, and economic face of education today, educators must consider situations and experiences that extend beyond the traditional classroom setting. Recognizing the limitations of task-based instruction should call for ongoing teacher reflection, incorporation of learner feedback, and outsider observations.
These aspects need to be included in curriculum development in order to make a more complete evaluation of the curriculum’s success in this context.

The idea of task completion through collaborative efforts with fellow students lends itself to new ways of thinking about the learning process. During this study I found that spending time at the beginning of the semester on whole class instruction builds confidence in communication among students. It takes repetition and a rationale explanation from the teacher in order for students to feel more comfortable with this type of teaching method. Once both teacher and learner recognize their roles in the classroom, overall success will be achieved in teaching and learning English in this context. Within the English for Jobs context, task-based instruction provides a general framework geared towards more interaction with peers in real-world contexts which will aid learners on the road to success in the workplace and contributions made in their new communities.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Lesson Particulars

It is 9:00 A.M. and the fifth week in the eight-week course. Ten students are sitting at three tables positioned in a U-shape so as to foster more face-to-face interaction. Each student comes to class with his or her spiral notebook and accompanied with various handouts that the teacher has provided for them in previous lessons. They each take a copy of *The Oxford Picture Dictionary* to use during the lesson and utensils provided on the middle table. The teacher has brought various supplies for the lesson, including handouts and enlarged pictures from *The Oxford Picture Dictionary* to use for demonstrations. A world map (with thumbtacks positioned on native countries represented in the class), a United States map, a class birthday calendar, and “How to Get a Job” checklist poster are displayed on the walls.

The teacher begins the lesson by facilitating a game of Hangman to review vocabulary words previously studied under the theme of work experience. The students take turns facilitating the game while other students guess words related to types of jobs such as *childcare worker, cook,* and *housekeeper.* After four rounds of Hangman, the teacher draws a concept map on the board with the word JOB written in the middle, and wh-questions surrounding it. “Where was it (use world map for reinforcement)? When did you have the job (what years)? How much did you get paid (draw a dollar sign)? She then calls on a few students to provide information about their work experience related to the questions on the board. Some of the students don’t remember how much they were paid or exactly how long they worked. The teacher asks the students to think about these details as they could be important in filling out a job application or in a job interview. The students are then given a blank Work Experience sheet (see accompanying handout) that they fill out their personal information on. She demonstrates how to fill it out by using some student examples and writing them on the board. Some students are able
to fit all their work experience information (what, where, when) on one line, but most have to use two lines. Many of them look at pictures and descriptions of types of work in their dictionaries or in their handouts to help them spell out what they need to write. The teacher also assists in spelling by writing the types of work on the board.

When students are finished writing down their work experience, the teacher has the class work in pairs to learn about others’ work experience. Each partner must ask the other the wh-questions written on the board and then write down the responses on the Work Experience sheet underneath their own information. Before they get started, the teacher repeats these questions and has the students repeat them after her. Before the break at 10:30, the pairs of students are instructed to introduce their partners to another pair of students. They ask each other the same questions and compare their work experiences with other groups.
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