

The Communicativeness of Activities in a Task-based Innovation in Guangdong, China

Chunrao DENG and David CARLESS
University of Hong Kong

This paper analyses the extent of communicative activities in a Year Four primary school class in Guangdong, where a national task-based innovation has been mandated. The framework guiding the study uses a continuum of communicativeness of activities, developed by Littlewood. The research methods comprised 12 classroom observations and 17 interviews. The findings indicate that most of the activities were on the left hand side of Littlewood's (2004) continuum, in other words, were mainly focus on forms, rather than focus on meaning. There was not much evidence of teaching congruent with principles of task-based teaching due to constraints such as traditional examinations and limited teacher understanding of how to carry out communicative activities. Implications for Littlewood's communicative continuum and contextually appropriate teaching approaches are discussed.

Introduction

In contemporary East Asia, the related concepts of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) form a central pillar of language policies (Nunan, 2003). Despite their popularity at the policy level, recent literature reports on numerous challenges in implementing TBLT in Chinese contexts (Carless, 2004; Hu, 2002, 2005b; Littlewood, 2007). There is clearly a need for more critical scrutiny of the suitability of task-based approaches for schooling, particularly in contexts where TBLT may prove to be in conflict with traditional educational norms (Carless, 2007; Ellis, 2003).