Taking Risks in Task-based Teaching and Learning

Gertrude TINKER SACHS
Georgia State University

Further to Tinker Sachs (2007), this paper reports on the development of task-based learning and teaching (TBLT) within a cooperative learning (CL) and teacher action research context. The three-year longitudinal project involved 12 teachers and their students from 3 government primary schools in Hong Kong. When innovative ways of teacher professional development in language teaching are fostered, a great deal of teacher and learner risk-taking is necessary for teaching and learning success. This paper reports on the risk-taking behaviours of teachers and students as they engaged in TBLT and CL. Data were drawn from teacher and learner interviews, questionnaires, lesson feedback and tran-scriptions. The results indicated that with an action research framework in a TBLT and CL classroom environment, both teachers and students increased their use of the target language. Teacher risk-taking involved development of learner-centred teaching routines and the creation of tasks for language devel-opment. Similarly, learners exhibited a need for more learner-centred activities in English to extend their conversational repertoire. Recommendations are offered for promoting the conditions in which both teachers and learners can engage in the kinds of risk-taking that underpin successful task-based teaching and learning.

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and cooperative learning (CL) are similar in several ways: they both provide frameworks for instruction such as pre-task, while-task and post-task stages in TBLT (e.g., Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1998; Tinker Sachs, Candlin, Rose & Shum, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007) and structured grouping of learners in CL (e.g., Cohen, 1972; Slavin, 1985; Kagan, 1992; Jacobs, Siowck