

**“We Learned Together it was Best Experiences for Me:” Website  
Creation in an ESL Classroom**

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**Abstract**

This qualitative, exploratory study investigated the learning opportunities and learning strategies afforded by technology-mediated tasks. In this study, a group of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners at an American university worked together to design and create a website for potential international students who are considering studying abroad in Alaska. Through the students' post-task reflections, the following themes surfaced: “doing something authentic and meaningful,” “working together,” “learning English,” and “building confidence.” Within these themes, several types of language learning strategies consistently emerged through the data analysis: arranging and planning, self-evaluating, and cooperating

**Keywords**

English as a second language, Task-based language Teaching, Language learning Strategies, Technology-Mediated Tasks

**Introduction**

Some of the often cited benefits of using web-based content and participating in social media is that it is student centered [1], it provides access to linguistically and culturally authentic materials [2], it offers opportunities for meaningful interaction beyond the confines of the classroom [3,4,5], and it can increase learner motivation [6,7].

The development from relatively static websites created by a small number of experts, to the current more participatory and dynamic social media uses of the Internet, has drastically changed who creates content and how we interact with information and with each other. It is now easier than ever before for anyone, including language learners, to create content for the Web. Rather than being consumers of content created by native speakers and experts, Web 2.0 tools allow language learners to create blogs, podcasts, websites or to participate in interactions through social media, by responding to blogs or through fan-fiction sites.

While there is much excitement about the kinds of language learning opportunities afforded by activities that are entirely mediated by technology (such as synchronous CMC [4,8,9], digital gaming [10,11], and virtual worlds [12,13,14]), not all language learners and instructors are ready to tackle the technological and pedagogical challenges these technologies present. Therefore, it is important not to overlook the language learning opportunities presented by less high-stakes technology integration, especially those that are integrated into a sound pedagogical framework for language teaching and learning, such as

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). In this way, the language learning goals and learners' needs drive the selection of appropriate technology tools, rather than the other way around. Therefore, conducting a needs analysis is a necessary first step in developing

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meaningful technology mediated tasks [15].

In our case, we identified meaningful opportunities for language use and integration of language skills as the overarching needs of our students. At the same time, the ESL program was in need of developing a more effective web presence. Coupled with our pedagogical orientation towards TBLT, this prompted us to develop a semester-long webpage design task, that would integrate smaller tasks of creating short written texts, audio podcasts and expository digital videos. In this way, we hoped to reap the benefits of what González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) call technology-mediated TBLT, making the case that “TBLT can be greatly enriched as an approach to language pedagogy by the infusion of new technologies, on the one hand, and the new technologies can become uniquely useful for language learning when undergirded by programmatic TBLT thinking, on the other” [7].

In the following sections we first discuss Podcasting and digital video, then we define and make connections to TBLT, before briefly reviewing the literature on language learning strategies we found most informative in our current study.

### **Podcasting and digital video**

In very general terms, a podcast is any audio (increasingly also video) file that can be posted on the Web and that can be downloaded to an iPod (or other mp3 player) or streamed from the Internet [16]. Because of the ubiquitous nature of Web 2.0 tools in our everyday lives, most people have at the very least listened to a podcast or watched a video clip posted on a website or shared through social media. In fact, in 2008, Snelson reported that almost 60% of all Internet users watched and often shared videos online [17].

Podcasts and digital video have been used extensively in higher education, especially in distance education [18]. For example, the Open University offers free content as well as tuition based courses via iTunesU, including language learning modules (<http://www.open.edu/itunes/>). Researching the use of digital video lectures in higher education, Tiernan found that college students wanted to see even more content delivered via online video lectures [19].

In addition to educational podcasts and videos specifically created for (language) learners, an often cited use of online audio and video is to provide access to linguistically and culturally authentic input to language learners. In fact, several authors [1,20] have reported on the use of podcasts to support students' listening comprehension. Listening to podcasts and watching videos that were created by native speakers for native speakers allows language learners to interact with current events, high interest topics and native speaker language models with the added benefit of being able to play a file over and over or to slow down the speed of the recording to make it more comprehensible.

Increasingly though, digital audio and video have been put in the hands of the learner to create their own content and, as some would argue, to avail themselves of authentic and meaningful opportunities to participate in the Web 2.0 experience. According to GonzálezLloret and Ortega, “Web 2.0 technologies create unprecedented environments in which students can engage in “doing things” through technology-mediated transformation and creation processes, rather than just reading about language and culture in textbooks or hearing about them from teachers” [7]. In fact, anyone who owns a smartphone, or any other Internet connected mobile device (such as an iPad) has all the tools needed to create and share a digital audio and/or video. After all, who has not taken a short video clip with their phones and shared it with their family and/or friends through texts, e-mail or social media? According to Pew [21], “The vast majority of Americans – 95% – now own a cellphone of some kind. The share of Americans that own smartphones is now 77%” (para 2), and the numbers are even higher for Americans under 30.

Additionally, "around seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves" [22].

Because Podcasts are usually scripted and rehearsed before a final version is posted on the Internet, and because learners can also listen and re-listen to their own podcasts, making corrections along the way, some researchers have investigated the effect of creating Podcasts on pronunciation [16]. In particular, students "appreciated the feedback given for each scripted recording and enjoyed opportunities for creativity during extemporaneous podcasts" [16]. Possibly more important than pronunciation though, is the more general opportunity for students to produce comprehensible output [23,24] for an audience beyond their instructor and/or their peers. In our needs analysis, we identified an authentic purpose and audience for the website, namely providing information for international students interested in studying at the university. The website creation task was also informed by a desire to provide a more integrated approach to ESL classes. As is the case in many ESL programs, classes are divided into Academic Reading, Academic Writing, and Speaking. As an integrated task, creating the website required students to draw on their full range of language skills and additionally a full range of modalities (beyond the linguistic mode alone) [25,26].

Creating their own multimedia content, such as a website that consists of text and images as well as audio podcasts and digital video, provides opportunities for learners to utilize a range of modalities and ways of expression that draw on an expanded notion of literacy. The multiliteracies framework view meaning making in the age of technology innovation such as Web 2.0 as necessarily multimodal [27,28,29,30]. In addition, it views learners as active designers of meaning. Darrington and Dousay go as far as to claim that multimodal writing assignments can be "transformational" [6]. Some might even argue that Web 2.0 tools have transformed writing in general and the very nature of text and genres in particular [31]. Thus, authentic writing tasks for language learners should also go beyond the linguistic mode, and include multimodal texts such as websites, podcasts, and digital storytelling.

Another way in which podcasting and video creation tasks, like the ones used in our study, are integrated is that "student-created videos may involve considerable writing and speaking as well" [1]. In other words, the process of creating audio and video files for inclusion on the website requires a process of planning, storyboarding, drafting, revisions, recording and rerecording. Furthermore, when students work together on a shared product, they engage with each other to negotiate for meaning, weigh different options, make decisions and provide feedback to each other.

### **Technology-mediated task-based language teaching**

This study reports on a semester-long website creation task. Ellis defines a "task" as follows: a primary focus on meaning, a gap of some sort, learners relying on their own resources, and a clearly defined outcome other than language use [32].

The larger semester-long task of creating a website designed for an authentic audience of future international students, as well as the creation of podcasts and digital videos clearly represent a situationally authentic outcome other than language. Creating informational multimedia resources about "life in Alaska" focused students' attention on meaning, rather than finite grammar points. Some tasks required students to overcome an information gap (learning how to create a website, learning about Alaskan culture), while others can be characterized as containing an opinion gap (group decisions about web page design, content of collaboratively created podcasts and videos). The opinion gap, in particular, offered abundant opportunities of interactions that were internationally authentic [33]. Furthermore, assessments focused primarily on task completion, coupled with an emphasis on the content, support the primary meaning focus so central to TBLT. While the course instructor did provide reactive focus on form [34,35]

through formative feedback, students had to rely on their own resources because the instructor did not provide formal instruction on grammar or web design.

Large projects such as developing a website often require collaborative learning, offer choices and necessitate personal initiative. For some students from countries where more individual, grammar-focused instruction is the norm, this might require a new set of language learning strategies.

### Language learner strategies

Our Language learning strategies have been defined and categorized a number of ways. For example, Cohen has defined language learner strategies as “thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance” [36]. In reviewing several taxonomies of language learning strategies, including Cohen (2014) and Oxford (1990), the following types of language learning strategies emerged as shared categories:

those that can be cognitive in nature, and that can involve compensation strategies or memory work; metacognitive strategies, in which learners plan and evaluate their learning; social strategies, which learners use while interacting with others; and affective strategies, which allow learners to regulate their emotions.

Table 1 below presents and briefly describes categories within the larger frameworks presented by Oxford and Cohen [36,37].

**Table1.** Strategy types and descriptions

Strategy Category	Oxford (1990, pp. 18-21)	Cohen (2014, pp. 19-20)
	Direct Strategies	Strategies by Function
Cognitive	Practicing; Sending and receiving messages; Analyzing and reasoning; Creating structure for input and output	Being aware of and conceptualizing processes in language learning and in activating knowledge
	Indirect Strategies	
Metacognitive	Arranging and planning one’s learning; Centering one’s learning; Evaluating one’s learning	Pre-assessing and preplanning of language learning; Online planning and monitoring; Evaluating language learning post-task
Affective	Lowering one’s anxiety; Encouraging oneself; Taking emotional temperature	Regulating emotions, motivation, attitudes; Reducing anxiety; Providing self-encouragement
Social	Asking questions; Cooperating with others; Empathizing with others	Clarifying social roles and relationships; Cooperating with others

Oxford organizes language learning strategies as direct and indirect strategies, while Cohen categorizes the strategies by function [37,36]. We have included this select list from both frameworks, which captures what we consider a useful starting point for investigating strategy use among learners engaging in a technology-mediated task.

The present study aims to report on how language learning strategies emerge as learners are engaged in a technology-mediated task. Thus, we explored the following research question:

- What learning opportunities and learning strategies are afforded by task-based approaches in instruction that emphasize collaborative learning with technology?

### **Research Methodology**

The present study follows a case study design. As van Lier summarizes, "case study research has become a key method for researching changes in complex phenomena over time. Many of the processes investigated in case studies cannot be adequately researched in any of the other common research methods" [38]. Moreover, Dörnyei noted that understanding learners' strategies requires "obtaining thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context" [39]. Therefore, in order to allow for thick description and to capture change over time, data collection took place over the course of one semester (Spring 2017 - 16 weeks). We collected a variety of qualitative data, including: 1. Post-task interviews with the students; 2. Student artifacts such as drafts, storyboards, podcasts and other assignments related to creating the web site; 3. Observations of group work leading up to the final task of creating the web site; and 4. Field notes of planning sessions and regular debriefings with the ESL instructors.

Data analysis followed the principles of constructivist grounded theory [40]. This analytic framework aims to develop new theoretical understandings based on participants' voices and actions, through intense engagement with rich qualitative data. Initial coding of the post task interviews generated a list of codes, which were grouped into categories or themes in relation to the research questions. Initial coding was not specifically about strategies, but about the task experience itself. In keeping with CGT, the analysis progressed from open coding, staying close to participants' words and actions, to relating the emerging categories or themes to theoretical understandings. In our case, we sought to more deeply understand connections between the task and language learning strategies. Rather than using an a priori taxonomy of language learning strategies, the connections emerged only after the categories had been identified. Overall, by employing grounded theory strategies, we were able to gain a clearer picture of what was occurring in our particular research setting.

### **Setting and participants**

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) is a public research university and a land-grant, seagrant, space-grant institution. UAF stakes much of its identity on Arctic Research relating to climate change, health, engineering (e.g., mining and geological engineering, petroleum engineering, civil and environmental engineering, etc.), as well as issues of Arctic Languages and Cultures.

The ESL program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks serves a number of populations of English language learners: undergraduate exchange students on a semester- or year-long exchange; international students at the undergraduate or graduate level who are pursuing a terminal degree (B.A., MA, etc.) and who wish to improve their academic English skills; and local community members who want to work on their language skills and/or who may apply for admission to a U.S. university. While the ESL program at UAF is small, students choose UAF because of its unique location, its academic programs, or because they are here for other personal reasons. ESL students studying at UAF have the opportunity to take three ESL courses in the fall and spring semesters of the academic year: Academic Reading, Academic Writing, and Academic Listening & Speaking. In order to take these classes at UAF, students need to have a minimum total score of 50 or above on the TOEFL (or the equivalent). Descriptions of each course are briefly outlined below.

The academic reading class provides learners with skills, strategies, and proficiency development in reading non-fiction texts. The topics and themes that were explored during the Spring 2017 semester included current events, travel writing, blogs, travel reviews, and

Alaskathemed readings. The main assignments for the class were current event write-ups and discussions, autobiographical paragraphs, top five lists, and a final project (travel research portfolio).

The academic writing class supports students in their essay writing. Throughout the course, students explore the differences between academic and non-academic writing, develop self-editing and peer editing skills, and engage in a variety of writing strategies and activities (e.g. brainstorming, outlining, peer review, and student-teacher writing conferences). The primary assignments for the class were three essays (ranging from 3-6 pages), shorter writing assignments and quizzes, and a final academic presentation.

The academic speaking and listening class prepares English language learners for the American university context by developing listening, note taking, and speaking skills. Topics and themes explored in this class during the Spring 2017 semester were related to university life and life in Alaska, and ranged from first impressions about Fairbanks, current events in Alaska, Alaskan food and wildlife, and spring break. The main assignments for the class were academic presentations and discussions, listening and note-taking quizzes, podcasts, and informational videos.

The participants of this study include one group of three English language learners who were enrolled in the Academic Listening & Speaking class: Barbara, Yuki, and Eva. Barbara was a full-time international student whose first language was Mongolian. She was taking ESL classes to improve her English so she could start an MBA program. Yuki's first language was Japanese and was a year-long undergraduate exchange student from Japan. At UAF she was taking ESL classes and some mainstream classes and had a general interest in English language teaching. Eva was not a traditional student, but a local community member who wanted to work on her English. Her first languages were Russian and Ukrainian, and she had a background in engineering. Barbara and Yuki were enrolled in all three ESL classes, while Eva attended only the speaking and listening class.



**Figure1.** Assignments that informed the website project

From the writing class, one of the shorter writing assignments (a postcard assignment) was part of the website project. Students wrote postcards to their families or friends describing life in Alaska and their experiences thus far at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The postcards were then uploaded to the ESL website to give potential exchange students an idea of what to expect from the program and Alaska in general. From the reading class, two assignments informed the website project: the autobiographical paragraphs and the top fifteen lists. For the autobiographical paragraphs, students wrote multiple drafts of autobiographical information with the intent of creating profiles for future exchange students to read on the website. For the top fifteen lists, students decided on a list of places/activities they would recommend in Fairbanks with the focused audience being future exchange students. Their top fifteen lists

informed their podcast and video topics in the listening and speaking class, where the bulk of the website project was housed. The key assignments in the listening and speaking class were video presentations and podcasts, many of which were uploaded to the website. Table 2 below shows the timeline of activities and topics covered in all three classes that were related to the website project. **Table2.** Timeline of data points and key activities

<b>Week</b>	<b>Task Element/Topic</b> <b>SC = Speaking Class; RC = Reading Class; WC = Writing Class</b>
W1	SC: Podcast (How was your winter break?, or What were your first impressions of Fairbanks/UAF?)
W2	SC: Podcast (Book about Alaska)
W3	SC: Podcast (What are some good sources for learning about Alaska?); Create a presentation for a summary of a source about Alaska
W4	SC: Podcast (What are some books about Alaska you would recommend to others?) RC: Fairbanks/UAF Top 15
W5	SC: Podcast (choose your own topic about UAF or Fairbanks); Find a news video about Fairbanks and create a mini-presentation about what it said WC: Postcard Assignment
W6	SC: Podcast (Update on your time at UAF); Find two news/informational videos about Alaska to share in class; Reflection: What did you learn about famous Alaskans? (recorded) RC: Biographies (Alaskan); Autobiography assignment WC: Writing Biographies, distinguishing reliable sources, including quotations in essays
W7	SC: Find sources for podcast report, write script for podcast WC: First draft of biographical essay
W8	SC: Watch a video/listen to a podcast about life in Fairbanks; Research the place of class field trip (Large Animal Research Station); Podcast (Large Animal Research Station) RC: Alaska Wildlife WC: Second draft of biographical essay
W9	SC: Podcast (What is Spring Break? What did you do for Spring Break?)
W10	SC: Podcast (What wildlife have you seen in Fairbanks?); What is your favorite animal of Alaska? Why? Prep for small discussion on Biographies WC: Final draft of biographical essay
W11	SC: Podcast (Choose your own topic about Fairbanks or UAF); Make a short presentation about plants or animals
W12	SC: How to create a video/creating storyboards; Podcast (What is different about the food in Fairbanks?); Make a short presentation about your favorite food RC: Food Reviews
W13	SC: Video editing; Podcast (Choose your own topic about Fairbanks or UAF); Pick two podcasts from the whole year that you like the best; Work on storyboards
W14	SC: Video editing; Podcast (What is a challenge you have had to overcome since you have been at UAF?)
W15	SC: Podcast (What is like preparing for the end of the semester?)
W16	SC: Final Presentation of Videos; post-task interviews

The website (see Appendix 1 for an image of the homepage) had the following components: student biographies, individual podcasts, photographs, postcards, and group video presentations. In order to do the video presentations, the students picked the podcasts that they liked the most, polished them up, and as a group recorded them for the website. The students used storyboards (see Appendix 2 for a sample storyboard) to prepare for filming the videos. These storyboards were student-created and were initially intended by the instructor as the first step in creating a script for the students to read while filming the video. However, the students preferred using the storyboard as an aid during the filming, so the videos were not scripted. In all, the students recorded a total of five videos, and the topics included Introductions; Good Sources to Learn about Fairbanks; Surviving the Cold; Food in Fairbanks; Wildlife in Fairbanks.

### Analysis

In The primary source for the following analysis is the post-task semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3 contains a sample list of questions), during which the students had an opportunity to reflect on the process of creating a website. Through our conversations with the students after the website project was completed, we identified a number of emerging themes in relation to learning opportunities and strategies that are afforded by technology-mediated tasks. The themes that we discuss below include: “doing something authentic and meaningful,” “working together,” “learning English,” and “building confidence.” In the following, we are organizing our analysis by theme/category and relating them to strategies in an effort to discover which types of strategies and/or ways to view strategies best fit our data.

### Doing something authentic and meaningful

All three of the learners expressed how the website task offered them the opportunity to use English in a real-life, authentic setting. For example, in the excerpt below, Yuki articulates the authenticity of the task when asked to expand on how the activities helped her with her English.

#### Excerpt 1. “We don't need to focus on speaking English ... we just talk in English”

Yuki: It was really fun for me because I never done this and actually like taking video making website also helped me my English yes.

Interviewer: Ah, how? How do you think it helped you with your English?

Yuki: Like when I when we are making website we have to talk in English so could communicate in English naturally because we don't we don't need to focus on speaking English when we like creating we just talk in English

Interviewer: Ah, interesting. What did you like best about creating the website?

Yuki: Mmmm. Best thing was like decided to make how to make website talking with my classmates and teachers

For Yuki, there is a clearly defined outcome other than language; in this case, creating the videos that would become part of the website. First, each member of the group speaks a different first language, requiring them to speak only English with each other. For example, while making decisions about what to include in the final video during the story boarding task, Yuki could speak English “naturally” with her partners and focus on meaning rather than form. Additionally, Yuki is highlighting how she and her partners, along with the instructor, cooperated to create the website. In addition to the authenticity of the task, Yuki brings out the



social strategy of cooperating with peers and a more proficient user of the language to make decisions on how to create the website.

While Yuki expressed how the task had interactional authenticity (that the activities in the task resulted in the kind of language use that can occur in non-pedagogic communication), Barbara and Eva focused on situational authenticity, where the context that the task created mirrored a real-life context. For instance, in Excerpt 2, Barbara expressed how the website allowed her to share photos and updates with her friends in a social media setting. In this excerpt, she is referring to the process of identifying which assignments (photos, podcasts, etc.) get uploaded to the website.

**Excerpt 2.** "They know I live in America so I wanna share"

<p>Barbara: Yeah I never seen never have seen created website it's very interesting and never make a video I never make a video myself so it was very interesting          Interviewer: Yeah so it was new for you. How did you like creating the website? Was it fun? Was it hard?          Barbara: It's easy and fun so maybe uhh certainly I students always communicate in their social network so let's make a website it's very interesting it's so easy and fun maybe we need to pull out our significant documents and pictures we put on the website and share with my friends they know I live in America so I wanna share</p>
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In addition to situational authenticity and the affordances of social networking, Excerpt 2 illustrates how Barbara uses metacognitive strategies. One way she does this is through the "[pulling] out [of] significant documents and pictures" as a way to arrange and plan her learning (organizing her pictures and assignments) in order to complete the website task. Moreover, Barbara, who had an interest in pursuing a master's in business administration, expressed later in the conversation (Excerpt 2.a) that knowing how to create a website can be a useful skill for her professionally in the future. In this statement Barbara is showing another metacognitive strategy by identifying a purpose in the task as being helpful for her future career goals.

**Excerpt 2a.** "I need make website it's very good good for me"

<p>Barbara: so this website yeah is usually make it is good experience for the individual usually I ( ) in the company in the future so I need make website it's very good good for me</p>
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While Barbara focuses on the creation of the website as a situationally authentic task, Eva brings out the situational authenticity of the task's topic and her own content learning. In Excerpt 3 below, Eva describes that the website project allowed her to read and discover more about wildlife, different people and places in Alaska.

**Excerpt 3.** "Real life, real life"

<p>Eva: I like read books different books and uh when uh since when this start prepare website I read a lot read about wildlife I read about different animals [very]</p> <p>Interviewer: [yeah]</p> <p>Eva: interesting because I come I come only five months I [but it more nice]</p> <p>Interviewer: [so it prepares you for the topics, ok]Eva: real life real life and when prepare to read more try found information about people, about places, very good, I like it</p>
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Because Eva sought opportunities to do extra reading in preparation for the tasks, she is using the metacognitive strategy of arranging and planning her learning. Additionally, as Eva did a significant amount of reading on her own to prepare for creating the podcasts and the videos, she demonstrated learner agency in that she showed a willingness to invest in the learning process and take significant action (in the form of extra reading) for her learning.

To summarize, the students articulated a number of ways that the task was authentic and meaningful, and identified how the task was both interactionally and situationally authentic. The project offered meaningful learning opportunities, whether they were related to the students' real-life social and professional activities (Barbara), improving communication skills (Yuki), or learning more about current and historical events in Alaska (Eva). Additionally, as students reflected on the task's authenticity, we observed some connections to metacognitive and social learning strategies. For instance, Yuki emphasizes the social strategy of cooperating with peers while deciding how to create the website, while Barbara and Eva highlight the metacognitive strategies of focusing on the purpose of the task and/or planning their learning in preparation for the task.

### Working together

All of the students expressed their appreciation of learning from each other and working on the project as a group. For instance, when asked about what she learned from creating the website, Yuki highlighted the group experience in Excerpt 4:

#### Excerpt 4. "We learned together it was best experiences for me"

Interviewer: So what did you learn from creating the website? What are some things that you learned that you'd like to share?

Yuki: OK last semester like I was taking class and studied by myself even in the class but this semester because of the website so we like studied together we learned together it was best

Yuki's statement in Excerpt 4 is an example of how the website task caused a shift in her strategic behavior. She mentions how she studied by herself in the previous semester's classes, and also alludes to doing limited group work in the classes themselves ("studied by myself even in the class"). However, because of the website, she felt that she was able to study and learn with her classmates, thus engaging in the social strategy of cooperating with others.

In many of the assignments for the website (podcasts, postcard, etc.), the students shared some of their personal experiences and preferences. In Excerpt 5, Barbara shows an appreciation for her group mates, and expresses enjoyment learning about the other members of the group through the assignments. Barbara also articulates her excitement about working in a team **Excerpt 5.** "We can work one team"

Barbara: Yeah it's ... absolutely it's very ... fun we have shared for some weeks Yuki and Eva they are so cute sweetie .... I need to ... read .. more about Eva so she upload here ( ) pictures so ... she say maybe she ski in Anchorage I never seen ... in Anchorage before so oh! that's nice maybe I can get information other ... people and we can work one team ... one team it's very nice we work very closely so yeah today is our last class ... I ... um little bit cry because we work so closely

Interviewer: Yeah, so it's a really nice way to get to know the people in your group ra: and shared some works oh Yuki you can make some pictures I make video or maybe together and we shared some group works of group work it's very nice

As Barbara was reflecting on how the group worked together, the social strategies of cooperating and empathizing with others came to the surface. For instance, Barbara explains how she was able to learn more about her classmates through the website task (such as reading about Eva's skiing trip in Anchorage). This sharing of personal information seemed to allow Barbara to feel comfortable working closely with her peers. Barbara highlights another social strategy by expressing her preference in cooperating with others through sharing responsibilities (such as Yuki choosing and uploading images while Barbara makes a video).

For Eva, working within a group of only three people had specific benefits - in Excerpt 6, she expresses how the context of a small group allowed her to get to know the other students and the teacher.

**Excerpt 6.** "I know the students I know the teacher"

Eva: Part of group um nice I liked it like especially we are not big group it worked good good because here if you have a lot people it always hard I know the students I know the teacher

Eva shared a similar sentiment to Barbara regarding the ability to get to know her classmates and her teacher. Engaging in the social strategy of empathizing with her peers was made more possible not only through the task, but also through being in a small group, as opposed to a class with many students.

From their reflections on the nature of the group work, the students identified a number of learning opportunities that are afforded by the task. All of the students, in their own way, engaged in social strategies and expressed an appreciation that they were able to learn together and from each other. This was highlighted in a number of ways: the divide-and-conquer benefits of group work (Barbara), the intimacy and familiarity that a small group setting offers (Eva), empathizing with each other through learning about one another (Barbara and Eva), and the benefits of working in a group compared with studying alone (Yuki).

**Learning English**

Each of the students identified how the website task helped them improve their English skills. In addition, some of the students articulated specific learning strategies that either helped them with the task or helped them improve their language skills in general.

In Excerpt 7, Yuki expresses how both the class and the website project allowed for further opportunities to develop her conversational skills. Yuki notes that while other classes focus just on writing or reading, the website project helped her focus on her conversational skills.

**Excerpt 7.** "Helped me talking like conversation style"

Yuki: Um, this class helped me talking like conversation style like the other classes just focus on writing or reading but this class was focusing on conversation so it was very good for me even like website creating project yeah

It was in response to comments like Yuki's ("other classes just focus on writing or reading") from students during the previous semester that prompted the instructors' conversations during the needs analysis to focus on the integration of skills and meaningful crossover relationships across the three classes. It is also worth noting that throughout Yuki's post-task interview, she highlighted several times her appreciation of being able to develop her speaking skills both in the class and while creating the website. Overall, Yuki paid most attention to her conversational

skills throughout the task - she engaged in a metacognitive strategy by using the development of her speaking skills as way to center her learning while creating the website.

Eva's reflection in Excerpt 8 begins with a focus on the development of her reading skills as part of the website project. However, further in the conversation, she also evaluates the helpfulness of the website's videos in the self-correction of her speaking errors. For Eva, the recorded videos of the task enabled her to identify her speaking errors ("listen what is false") to improve her speaking skills.

**Excerpt 8.** "Listen what is false when you speak ... it is an help for yourself"

<p>Interviewer: So how do you think it helped with your English?</p> <p>Eva: Uh, it help it help. I sit I try read uh reading is helpful when you read you try even if you don't understand all word but you could catch some information even if you don't know all words but you understand and help. um you read if you read every day a little uh after you uh it is start for you easy easy easier</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Eva: But it is really interesting yeah, and you can uh how to say, listen what is false [when you speak], what you do um, it is an help for [yourself]</p>
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Throughout the post-task interview, Eva highlights the development of her reading skills: by using the information from her readings to help improve her learning, she engaged in the metacognitive strategy of arranging and planning her learning. Additionally, by stating that if "you read every day a little" it becomes easier and easier, Eva expresses another metacognitive strategy, that of self-evaluating one's progress. The third metacognitive strategy in Excerpt 8 relates to self-monitoring in relation to the speaking activities within the website (podcasting and video production). When Eva says that one can "listen what is false when you speak...it is an help for yourself," she is able to notice and identify her errors from the videos and podcasts.

In Excerpt 9, Barbara expresses her excitement about creating videos for the website to share with friends. She articulates a need to improve her listening skills in order to create the videos, and identifies watching vlogs on YouTube as a strategy to develop her listening comprehension skills.

**Excerpt 9.** "Maybe I need to improve my listening"

<p>Barbara: so now we have ( ) provide videos ... we can share with friends ... maybe I need to improve my listening so I watch this American vlog on YouTube yeah so then personally I thought I want to make some video on the YouTube it's me maybe make a little money so funny some a lot of people write comment on on under my videos it's so funny I want to do this but teacher makes it we made we will make some video so I'm so excited and website we get get it on the website</p>
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Throughout Excerpt 9, Barbara highlights the metacognitive strategies of arranging and planning her learning: she determined that her listening skills needed improvement, then, in order to prepare for creating the videos on the website, she sought out practice opportunities by listening to and watching YouTube videos. By expressing a willingness to invest in the task and take action for her learning, Barbara also demonstrates learner agency.

When it came to learning English, the fact that the students were able to focus on different skills (speaking - Yuki and Eva, listening - Barbara, and reading - Eva) highlights the flexibility of the task, in that the students felt that they were able to focus on whichever skill(s) they needed to improve. The integrated nature of the task also allowed the learners to work on all the skills, even though they may have focused on one. Additionally, as they reflected on how the

task afforded opportunities for developing language skills, a number of metacognitive strategies emerged during the conversations: centering the learning (Yuki); arranging and planning the learning (Barbara and Eva); and self-monitoring and self-evaluating (Eva). The concept of learner agency also surfaced through Eva's and Barbara's reflections, as Eva and Barbara both shared how they sought additional opportunities to practice English and to prepare for the website tasks.

### **Building Confidence**

Another theme that emerged relates to how the task enabled the learners to see their progress, resulting in affirmations of their increased confidence in speaking English. It is noteworthy to mention that these affirmations tended to co-occur with initial statements of uncertainty or doubt. In fact, every single student expressed some nervousness or apprehension about their English skills, and most of these sentiments were expressed while the students were talking about recording the videos for the website. They were "maybe little worried because I speak not good English" (Eva), and thus felt the need to "speak properly" (Yuki) or "must not speak with mistake" (Barbara). Although all of the students expressed doubt, in the end, they each mentioned how their confidence in their language skills had grown. These expressions of confidence ranged from explicit affirmations ("Now I can" - Eva; "made me like confident" - Yuki) to more indirect implications ("I don't worry about the anything" - Barbara).

In Excerpt 10, Yuki starts by sharing that recording the videos made her nervous because she wanted to "speak properly," but that gradually, she became more confident.

#### **Excerpt 10.** "Little by little it made me like confident to speaking English"

<p>Interviewer: OK, how, so you said it was really fun, were there any parts that were challenging um...</p> <p>Yuki: Taking video is very challenging like it made me like it got really nervous for me like I tried to speak properly so it was really hard for me be by one by one little by little it made me like confident to speaking English so it helped a lot</p>
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The gradual confidence Yuki mentions likely came about because the students created and edited five videos during the last month of the semester, thus enabling them to practice and become more comfortable with the process of recording the videos. Having opportunities to shoot a video multiple times as well as edit those videos also allowed the students to become more comfortable with the process. Additionally, editing and re-recording video and audio with the instructor's help as needed allowed them to monitor their own language use. Through these multiple iterations and opportunities for feedback from the instructor on both language use and technology use, Yuki was thus able to self-evaluate her language learning progress, and even though she expressed nervousness about recording the videos, she acknowledged that "it helped a lot."

Eva also expresses doubt and uncertainty in Excerpt 11, by questioning whether it would be possible for the group to create a website because of the time constraints. Then later in the conversation, she reflects on a time when she was first in Fairbanks and "could not speak at all," but that now she can speak.

#### **Excerpt 11.** "Now I can"

<p>Interviewer: Great! Sounds like you had a really good experience.</p> <p>Eva: Good. very very good. I- {teacher} said we make we will make a website, I think how we can have a little time no no no, too much time how we can make? Nobody can do it, but maybe not good, but [we did it] yeah yeah (laugh)</p>
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Interviewer:	[you did it] (laugh)
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In Excerpt 11, Eva evaluates not only her progress, but also the progress of the whole group (“we did it”). When the instructor presented the task as a class project, Eva was initially concerned that not only would there not be enough time to complete the task, but also that the website would not be of high quality (“maybe not good”). Later in the conversation, she reflected that the task allowed her the opportunity to self-evaluate her progress in her conversational abilities; that is, engaging in the task prompted her to remember that when she first arrived in Fairbanks, she “could not speak at all,” but that “now [she] can.”

Excerpt 12 illustrates how Barbara expressed in a more implicit way her growing confidence levels while doing the task. Towards the beginning of the post-task interview, Barbara conveys that she was nervous about the task for two reasons: 1) she did not want to speak with any mistakes while doing the videos, and 2) no one in the class had any experience creating a website. Sometime later in the conversation, she reiterates her uncertainty by saying that she could not imagine being able to make a website. Then towards the end of the excerpt, Barbara shares the social strategy of asking questions in order to overcome her nervousness and become more confident.

**Excerpt 12.** “I don't worry about the anything and if I don't know I ask her”

Barbara: Umm ( ) our video I I mustn't I mustn't I must not uh speak with mistake I worry about that or none of us making website ... nervous a little bit on the video yeah ..... Barbara: (laugh) um I don't know how can I say it! mm I don't know how far I couldn't imagine this make website ..... Barbara: I ask the teacher what will I do what did you do or what's happened or what mistake of my speech or my speaking I ask my mistake I ask my teachers it's really very helpful improve my Eng- speaking and listening ..... Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like this helped with your speaking and listening Barbara: Yeah cause I don't worry about the anything and if I don't know I ask her ... they told me yeah and this class not too much ( ) uh for we are we know about each other it's a lot of good consequences
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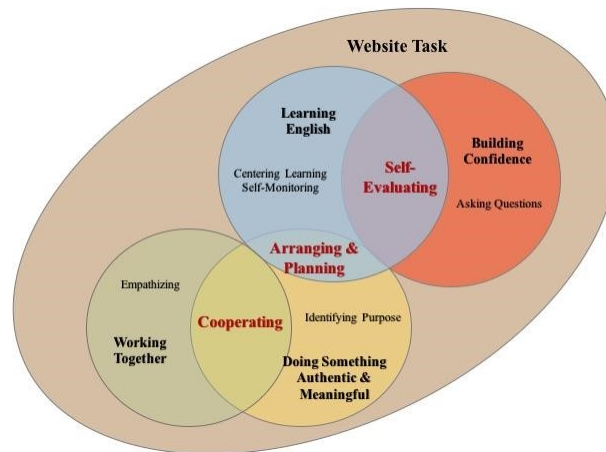
Throughout the conversation, Barbara evaluates the task as being helpful to improve her English, and allowing her to self evaluate her progress in her listening and speaking skills. Additionally, rather than explicitly claiming that her confidence grew or that she was able to do the task, Barbara expresses her confidence by stating that she does not worry about anything, because if she does not know something, all she needs to do is ask for help (mainly from the instructor). Barbara’s confidence in asking questions appears to stem from her feeling comfortable working closely with her classmates (see Excerpt 5), and that because they “know about each other it’s a lot of good consequences.”

Although the website task presented some challenges to the students (feelings of uncertainty), they each expressed how their confidence grew as a result of engaging in the website task. They each mentioned that they noticed a particular improvement in their speaking skills, as the task enabled them to engage in the metacognitive strategy of self evaluating their progress.

### Conclusions

Overall, the website task afforded a number of learning opportunities for the students: 1) learning how to create a website, 2) developing English language skills (especially speaking,

listening, and reading), and 3) learning as a group and from each other. As the students reflected on their experiences creating the website, they expressed how the task was authentic and meaningful, how it helped with their language learning, how it enabled them to work together as a group, and how their confidence grew as a result of engaging in the task. Additionally, through their reflections, a number of connections to language learning strategies (mostly metacognitive and social strategies) emerged when the students discussed their experiences creating the website. Figure 2 below is a visual representation of how the language learning strategies interact with the initial themes. In Figure 2, each theme (“doing something authentic and meaningful,” “building confidence,” “learning English,” and “working together”) is represented within separate circles. The language learning strategies that surfaced throughout the students’ reflections are listed within each theme where they occurred. When there was overlap (that is, when the same strategies were identified in more than one theme), the strategy is written in red across the circles.



**Figure 2.** Interactions between themes and learning strategies

The highest levels of overlap occurred in the following: cooperating, arranging and planning, and self-evaluating. Although the learners engaged in several social strategies (cooperating, asking questions, empathizing), cooperating with others emerged the most frequently within the initial themes of “working together” and “doing something authentic and meaningful.” As discussed above, one of our initial intentions when designing the task was to provide opportunities for meaningful and authentic interactions and language production. The emerging interactions of these themes in our data inform us that the task design allowed the learners to cooperate together while doing something authentic and meaningful. In fact, as Godwin-Jones noted, “the interactions within the working groups can be as valuable a part of the learning experience as actually creating the video” [1]. This is a sentiment that clearly emerged throughout the conversations with all three learners.

The students also employed a number of metacognitive strategies (self-evaluating and self-monitoring, arranging and planning, identifying purpose, centering learning). The most commonly used of these were arranging and planning and self-evaluating, which appeared within the themes of “doing something authentic and meaningful,” “learning English,” and “building confidence.” Another intention in our design of the task was to create the conditions that would allow for the integration of skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Within this particular task, the learners were able to integrate all of the language skills and focus on meaning in order to problem-solve and produce an outcome other than language. Additionally,

because of the problem-solving nature that is inherent to TBLT, the design of the task facilitated the use of metacognitive strategies (in particular, arranging and planning and self-evaluating).

Throughout their interviews, all of the learners expressed uncertainty in their English skills while recording the podcasts and videos, as well as initial doubt about being able to create a website. However, participating in the task enabled the students to self-evaluate their learning, which allowed them to notice their language improvement and feel more confident in their English skills. Additionally, not only were the learners more confident in their language skills, they also expressed confidence in being able to complete a task that they had never done before. For the students in our study, who come from countries where a more individual, grammar focused instruction is the norm, a collaborative and technology-mediated task was something new, and although there was initial apprehension and nervousness about doing the task, it resulted in confidence building in the end. Our study provides further evidence for González-Lloret and Ortega's claim that "language learning tasks which are mediated by new technologies can help minimize students' fear of failure, embarrassment, or losing face; they can raise students' motivation to take risks and be creative while using language to make meaning" [7].

In addition to allowing for the integration of skills and providing opportunities for meaningful language use, our needs analysis identified students' interest in learning more about Alaskan culture and life in Alaska. We also wanted to generate meaningful crossover relationships across the three classes, with more opportunities for instructor collaboration. Although an increase in instructor collaboration was a natural consequence of the task, our study focused on the students' experiences. Therefore, an implication for future research is to investigate how the instructors experience the implementation of a task-based syllabus.

With regard to the objectives we set in the needs analysis, the task was largely successful. The students learned more about life in Alaska, and confidence levels in their language skills increased due to the task's affordances. Overall, the task allowed the students to self-evaluate their learning and notice their improvement, as well as engage in social strategies to cooperate and learn from each other. Moreover, we noted several times throughout the analysis how some of the learners demonstrated agency, and a willingness to invest in the task by seeking out additional opportunities to practice English. A further exploration of relationships between task design, strategy use, and agency would make a meaningful contribution to the field of language pedagogy.

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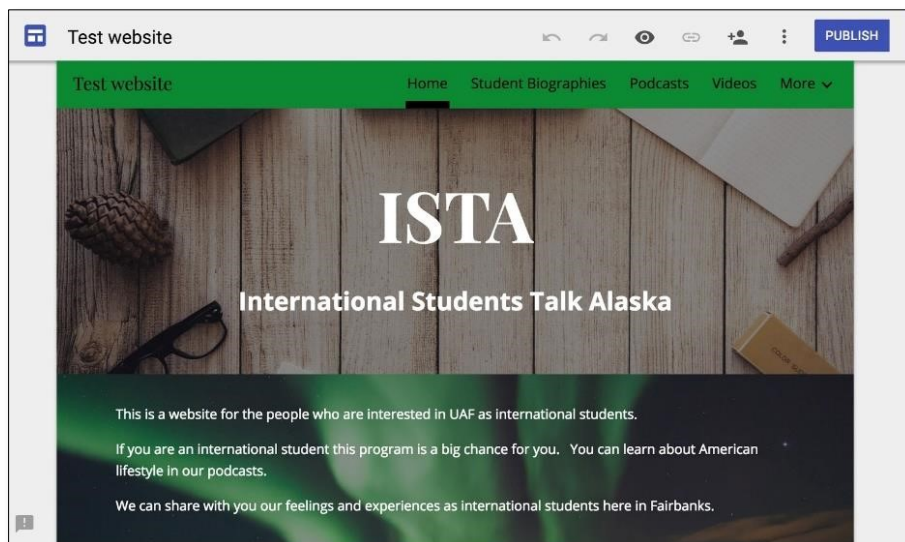


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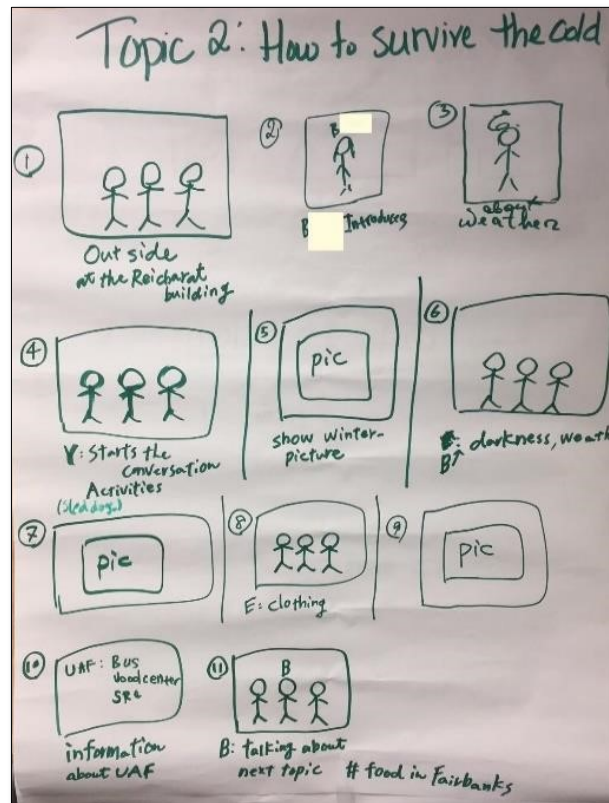
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- **Appendix**

**Appendix 1. Image of website homepage**



**Appendix 2. Example of storyboard “How to survive the cold”**



### Appendix 3. Sample list of interview questions

Tell me a little bit about your experience in creating the website.

- Have you ever created a website before?
- How did you like creating the website? Was it fun? Challenging? Why?
- What did you like best about creating the website?
- What did you not like about the activity? How can the activity be improved?  How did the activity make you feel? (anxious, happy, etc.)  How did you like creating the website as part of a group?
- What did you learn from creating the website?
- In what ways has creating the website helped you with English?

