

ELT



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TAPs: Text Analysis Presentations

By Tracy Bhoola (Senior ESL Teacher, York University English Language Institute)

Introduction

I developed TAPs as a creative, engaging and inspiring assignment that encompasses major and minor English language learning skills. Initially, my primary goal was to create an assignment that would lessen the fear and apprehension my students had when tasked with reading and comprehending Canadian texts of various levels of difficulty and diverse topics. I also wanted to take their learning with their classmates a step further with enriching critical thinking and discussion abilities. Through TAPs activities, students learn and practice their speaking, reading, writing, listening and vocabulary skills, along with developing their comprehension, group work and presentation competencies in an all-inclusive setting rather than practicing skills or topics in isolation. I often refer to TAPs as a 360° project in which the student presenters, classmates and teacher are all engaged simultaneously during the presentation and afterward during evaluations (Bhoola, 2017).

TAPs is different from a traditional teaching/learning method such as a 'pen and paper test' in which one subject or one skill is tested with limited forms of questions i.e.: multiple choice, in that it is a 360° assignment that enables students to use technology or paper, practice and strengthen their major (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and minor English skills (vocabulary, grammar) and learning strategies all under the guidance of the teacher and their classmates in a highly communicative and supportive setting. It is a remarkably adaptable assignment in regard to course, English proficiency level, vocabulary, article length and topic, discussion length and presentation style.

As I continued to develop TAPs, I realized it aligns with some theoretical concepts. I have integrated executive functioning, rhetorical teaching, Felder and Solomon's Learning Styles, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, reciprocal teaching, and Team-based learning (TBL). Sections of TAPs lend itself to student learning styles for visual, verbal, active, sensing and intuitive learners (1993). With Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, n.d., 2006), TAPs encourages intrapersonal intelligence by researching and reflecting; interpersonal by cooperatively solving problems and collaboratively discussing; spatial by representing ideas with pictures; verbal/linguistic by reading and analyzing written information; musical by including a video; and kinaesthetic by demonstrating movements and gestures during presentations. Next, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) provides the teacher and students with a framework of knowledge and cognitive processes from remembering, to applying, to creating. Using Bloom also provides students with question stems to create their critical thinking questions to be used during the discussion section. Depending on the class level, teachers can determine which question stems from Bloom's Taxonomy to use with the students. Finally, TBL (Brame, 2016) provides the students opportunities to: form groups; work and prepare as a team both in and out of the classroom; to reflect and then evaluate themselves and their group mates upon completion; have consistent group interaction; and to have the teacher as a guide in the learning process by establishing TAPs objectives and guiding them as they solve problems and complete the tasks.

"...provides the students opportunities to: form groups; work and prepare as a team both in and out of the classroom;..."

TAPs in Practice

Before I introduce the TAPs assignment to the students, I model a version of it for them. I take a Canadian newspaper to class, or show it online and have the students work in pairs or breakout rooms to read an assigned paragraph. Then, I have the students take turns reading it orally to each other, then I orally summarize the paragraph and show them my version of the summary. Next, I present 2-3 new words from the paragraph and produce the definitions, words families, collocations, parts of speech and example sentences. I give them a quiz, using Quizlet, Kahoot or Quizziz, on the vocabulary to ensure comprehension is accurate, but also to model a way to 'test' their understanding, which they can replicate during their TAPs.

Finally, I ask 2-3 critical thinking questions based on the article. For those critical thinking questions, I refer to Bloom's Taxonomy Revised (Anderson et al., 2001) for the question stems and then complete the stems with my ideas. The students (individually, in pairs, or in triads) then skim and scan the article for the answers and share the answers as a whole class. Once TAPs has been modeled, I then introduce the assignment that the students will complete by giving each student a detailed handout. Each section of TAPs can easily be assigned a time frame (appropriate to each teacher's schedule and level of students) so that the work is completed over more than one class. I generally have students working over a one to one-and-one-half-week period in and out of class with presentations beginning the following week. Depending

on student or class level and TAPs requirements (article length, number of words, discussion length etc.), each group may take anywhere from 25 to 60 minutes to present.

After I have modelled the TAPs and in order to achieve the assignment requirements, I have students choose an article, read and understand it, complete vocabulary work, summarize it, edit, create critical thinking questions and answers for discussion, prepare a handout, organize a group presentation, and practice. Then, the students are prepared to do their TAPs and present to the class their article, summary, vocabulary, questions and conduct a class discussion. I use a rubric while the students present, and it is a rubric that I share with all students prior to the presentations. After the TAPs, I meet with each group and review the completed rubric with them and then I give the students self and peer evaluations to complete and submit within a day or two afterward. Now, there are times when I do not provide the self and peer evaluations. For example, low level learners may not know how to effectively complete such evaluations due to language barriers and inexperience and so it takes class time to teach them.

Learning Outcomes

“From a teacher's perspective, I consider TAPs a successful teaching practice because it is highly flexible, functional and engaging.”

As comfort and confidence grow during TAPs preparation and practice stages, students cultivate their critical thinking skills, foster a growth mindset, enhance their oral communication abilities, and practice conversation strategies while engaging in small talk about the articles with their classmates and with English speakers. This serves to help them become more aware of and learn about Canadian culture, their communities and current events and continue reading authentic Canadian material after TAPs is completed. Of course, this is applicable to any culture and language beyond Canada and English. In addition, learners are able to practice pronunciation of new vocabulary, identify concordances, and use an English dictionary (paper or digital) and vocabulary strategies to delve into the word families, collocations and idioms associated with the new words. This would satisfy at least one objective of integrating the new words into their daily personal, academic, or vocational lives.

From a teacher's perspective, I consider TAPs a successful teaching practice because it is highly flexible, functional and engaging. For example, teachers can adapt the level of difficulty to any caliber of ESL student, or non-ESL student from elementary to university. TAPs can also be adapted to include long or short texts or e-lectures; academic journals, magazines or newspapers; individual or small groups; multi-media, technology or paper-based work; and just about any course or subject - all of which encourage students to read and think critically and construct and convey knowledge.

From my students' perspective, I consider TAPs a successful learning practice because I have discovered that my students are more engaged when the text is Canadian, current and of interest to them which is why I tend to let them choose their own articles.

From the beginning to end of one TAPs and also with repetition of TAPs, the learners' ability to communicate in written and verbal formats improves along with their aptitude for collaboration and cooperation with classmates. It is wonderful to see their confidence grow in their overall achievement in all of the major English skills and learning strategies being applied and practiced. Moreover, the inherent flexibility of TAPs makes it an activity that the students can do, more informally, at home with their families and friends, as well as adapting it to meet those needs. So, given the appropriate time, support and inspiration, students are able to complete a well-rounded project.

My students have provided feedback, both written and oral, that touches on the necessity of practicing major/minor English skills and that working on TAPs covers all of the skills in one place. They feel that TAPs gives them the time and flexibility they need to be successful in their own ways and are able to take on roles in the group that challenge their weaknesses and complement their strengths. The students have commented that their improvement is more obvious and "faster" than with standard tests or activities. The learners feel that TAPs is fun and allows them to be creative and independent but still dependent on group-mates and classmates. Students have also stated that they have a chance to be leaders and followers at different times during the TAPs process and therefore they do not feel as "stressed out" as when they have to complete a project or essay on their own. Lastly, students have commented that doing TAPs helps them to learn organization skills in part due to the layout of the requirements.

Variations

This article has endeavoured to describe an innovative teaching practice for the educational, personal and professional benefits of students. If you find yourself asking, "what else can be done with TAPs?", I believe teachers and students are only limited by their imaginations. Following are possible extension activities for TAPs if a teacher so chooses. Apps or educational technology tools could be used during the preparation stage with particular sections of the TAPs such as Google Docs, Flipgrid, Kaizena, emaze, Recordium, Simple Mind, Vocaroo and Voxer. These tools enable students to

practice individually or prepare together and the students are not bound by geography as they can work anywhere and anytime synchronously and asynchronously. Furthermore, to extend learning, the teacher could add another section to the TAPs assignment in which students produce their TAPs in a style reminiscent of a Socratic seminar, TED talk, or a YouTube video, or a flipped classroom version of the TAPs.

Another possibility is to allow students to integrate an artistic piece of work that represents their topic or a related theme in a song, photographs, a sketch, a painting, or a poem. For a challenge, teachers could encourage students to produce one-pagers on their topic and integrate their creation into the presentation. Lastly, with organization by the teacher, students could present to other classes within their programs or schools face-to-face or via Zoom or another platform.

Finally, I briefly mentioned meeting with students after their TAPs in order to discuss a marked rubric, give feedback and ask reflective questions. Another avenue that opens up is for teachers to provide their own critical reflection questions for students to answer over a designated period of time and to later meet with the teacher for review. The benefits of reflection in teaching and learning are numerous and would augment the learners' experiences. Also, conducting peer and self-evaluations are valuable. I have sometimes implemented these techniques with my students only after I conduct lessons on types of evaluations, the essential vocabulary, and how to complete evaluations. Overall, with the TAPs, rubric, and evaluations it is important to know where your students are at and start from there. It is a sentiment that has served me well and I hope it does for you too.

"The benefits of reflection in teaching and learning are numerous and would augment the learners' experiences."

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