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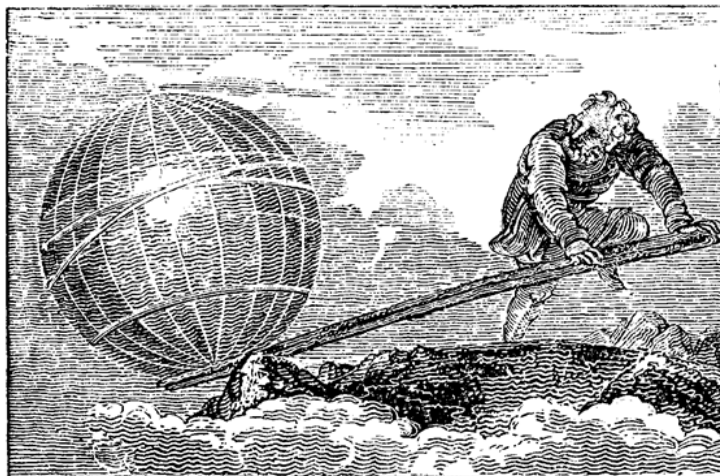
TEACHER'S TOOLBOX: DESIGNING TASKS FOR INTERACTION

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https://tinyurl.com/actfltasks

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Supporting Research and Theory

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1) **Communication Strategy (Canale & Swain, 1980)**

Language learning is done through verbal and nonverbal tactics aimed at avoiding communication breakdowns such as paraphrasing, gesturing, asking for clarifications.

2) **The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985)**

Language learning is acquired with comprehensible input. Learners should be exposed to input that they understand, but that slightly exceeds their current ability.

3) **The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985)**

Language learning is acquired not only with comprehensible input, but also with comprehensible output. When learners notice a gap in their knowledge, they may then attempt at modifying their output.

Output promotes automatization of language use, i.e. "consistent mapping of the same input to the same pattern of activation over many trials". (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 134)

4) **The Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996)**
 Language learning is facilitated by the use of the target language in interaction. Negotiation of meaning (when learners try to handle difficult situations in a communicative setting) specifically contributes to language acquisition as does feedback on production of language.

Development occurs when learners notice mismatches between input and their own organization of the target language. Those confirm or disprove hypotheses they had formed. (Gass 1997)

The Interaction Approach "is focused primarily on the role of input, interaction, and output in learning"(Gass & Mackey, 2015, p. 195).

5) **Collaborative Dialogue (Swain, 2005)**
 'Output' becomes 'collaborative dialogue'. Learners co-construct their linguistic knowledge and mediate their understanding. As they seek solutions together, they develop their proficiency. Interaction through problem-solving and knowledge-building is a social activity.

6) **Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)**
 Beyond physical and neural condition for higher-order thinking, human cognitive activity develops through interaction within social material environments. Thus, mental functions such as problem-solving, voluntary memory and attention, rational thought, planning, and meaning-making activity are strengthened by participation in culturally organized activities.

Learning collaboratively precedes and shapes development. What learners can do with help from others is an indication of what they will be able to do by themselves later. This is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Planned L2 environments can stimulate that development.

7) **Promoting the Development of Communicative Ability** (Van Patten, 2014)

Communication is "the expression and interpretation of meaning in a given context" (VanPatten, 2014, p. 24). With this in mind, learners interact in the classroom through carefully planned tasks that promote an exchange of information for a purpose (e.g. an information or communicative goal).

I. Definition:

High-leverage teaching practices (HLTPs) "are a core set of teaching practices that, when executed proficiently by accomplished novice teachers, are said to promote higher gains in student learning over other teaching practices" (Hlas & Hlas, 2012, p. S76).

II. Defining Tasks (Bygote, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Lesser & White, 2016; Skehan, 1998)

❑ Interaction
❑ Read-world relationships
❑ Communicative purpose that needs to be accomplished

III. Guiding questions to determine a purpose

A	**Analyze**
	What problem can students solve?

I	**Infer**
	What can students learn and then conclude?

M	**Make a Decision**
	What choice can students make?

III. Ask yourself these Questions as you Design Tasks

1.Will the task engage learners' interests?

2.Do they need to listen to one another to complete the task?

3.Does the task provide opportunity to negotiate meaning?

4.Is there a primary focus on meaning?

5.Does the task require the use of vocabulary, form, and function as planned?

6.Is there an objective or goal?

7.Does the task relate to the real-world?

Analyze
Let me analyze my information about ___ and you analyze your information about ___ so that together we can ___.

What do we still need?

Students must analyze a grocery list to make a recipe. Student A has the recipe. Student B can see the ingredient list. Together they must decide if they have enough of the ingredients to make the recipe and what they still need to buy at the store. They complete a grocery list at the end of the task. See Appendix A.

Puzzles.

This activity takes into account our natural curiosity to solve puzzles. Provide students with a blank map of a city, museum, or zoo. Students are given different clues and must work together to read clues and figure out where each piece fits in the city. For example, it may say "The bank is far from the grocery" "The grocery is next to the library".

Variations include solving the puzzle as a whole class. Use masking tape to create the unsolved map on the floor, print pictures of each building, and give clues out on strips of paper. Students are either holding a picture that will be mapped or holding a clue. They work together to solve the puzzle by moving around the people holding pictures while classmates read the clues. See Appendix B.

Resources for other information gap activities: http://halfacrossword.com/

Narrative Jigsaw Task.

Narrative jigsaw tasks are a great introduction to a story that will be read. This task taps into the oral tradition of story-telling and builds on skills such as sequencing.

Students receive different images from the same story (they need each other to complete the story). First, they work together to sequence the story. Then, they tell the story orally. Next, they retell it by either writing one word that describes the picture, a simple sentence, compound sentence, or what characters are saying versus thinking.
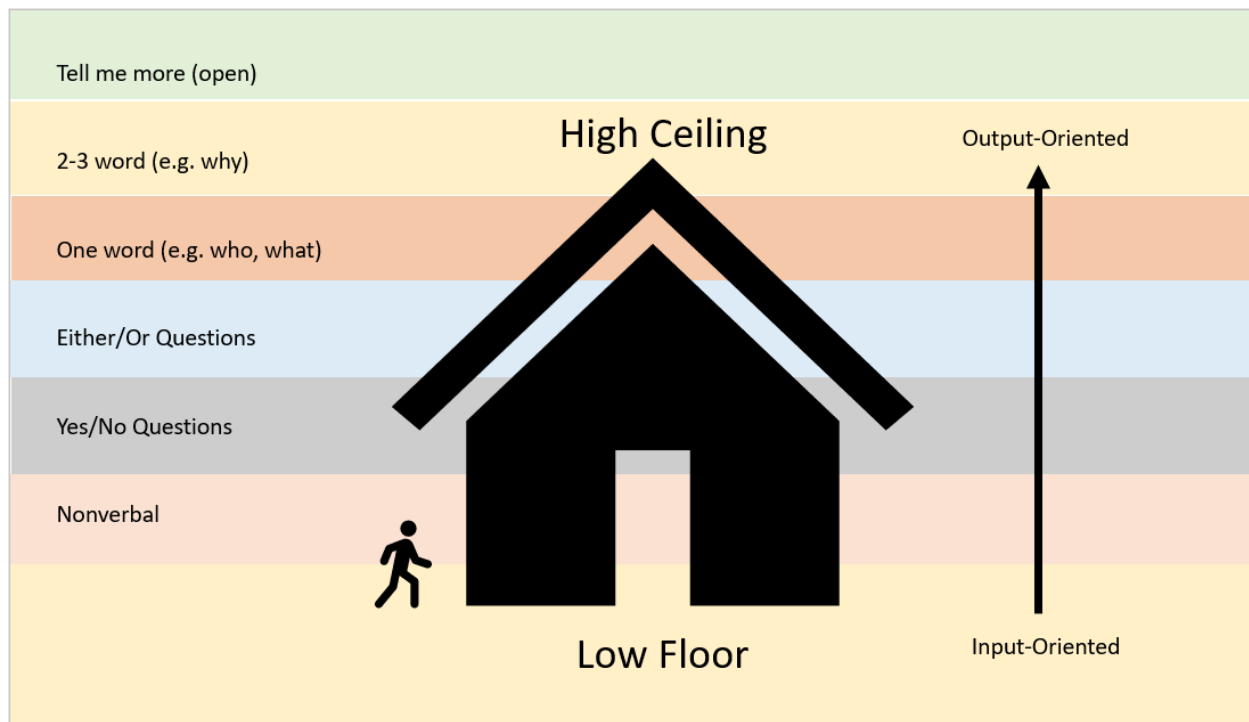
Resources for stories include http://en.childrenslibrary.org/, https://www.getepic.com/]

Similar or Different. Students are given two different pictures and are asked not to show the picture to one another. Students ask and answer questions to find a specific amount of differences between the pictures. They determine whether or not they were successful by comparing pictures at the end of the task. Variation: Students are given similar or different pictures and must work together to determine if they have the same picture.

Resources for pictures include clip art sites [http://www.kidsfront.com/find-differences.html], High Five magazines, and cultural images [https://www.gapminder.org/dollar-street/matrix].

Design Tip: Work with tasks that have a low floor and a high ceiling. That is, these tasks are accessible to all students but can be extended to varying levels. Tasks can be designed as more input-oriented or output-oriented (VanPatten, 2017).

Tell me about your closet.
The purpose of this task is for students to describe their closet. Guiding questions could be provided that ask them about a) organization b) type of clothes c) age of clothes d) number of clothes e) color of clothes and so on. Then, students listen to the description and infer something about that person based on their closet. Examples may include: personality Type A or B, sedentary or active lifestyles, nostalgic or forward looking, idealist or realist, or minimalist or extravagant mind-set.

Tell me if you are a risk taker.
The purpose of this task is to have students decide who is a bigger risk-taker. Given the question, *What would you do for $1000*, students ask and answer questions with a classmate to discuss what they would and would not do. Based on VanPatten (2017), this task can be developed as an input-oriented or an output-oriented task. [In the input-oriented task students are guided to ask and answer pre-planned questions](). In the output-oriented task students are given more room to ask and answer original questions on the task. In both versions, the students close by discussing which partner is more or a risk-taker, marking a simple scale.

As a variation, adding a kinesthetic component to this task, students could vote on the statements by sitting/standing. That is, the teacher would read and discuss a list of things that students would or would not do, in an order leading toward more adventurous statements. When students decide that they would not do something, they sit down and explain why they would not do it. The first one sitting is the most risk-averse and the last one standing is the risk-taker. Other variations may include tailoring the task around a different big question such as What did you do last weekend? (decide if you are more active or more of a home-body) or What will you do in the next 10 years? (decide if you are an idealist or a realist) or What would you say to ___ ? (decide if you are an extrovert or an introvert). See Appendix C.

Other inferences.

Tell me about your hobbies, and I'll tell you (infer) if you are active or sedentary.

Tell me about your desktop or home screen, I'll tell you (infer) if you are a pack rat or organized.

Tell me about the last 8 books you have read, I'll tell you (infer) if you are cerebral, dark, or romantic.

Tell me about your regular health habits (e.g., dentist and doctor visits, types of illness, exercise), I'll tell you if you have excellent, mediocre or problematic habits.

You're Invited!
The purpose of this activity is to read an invitation (e.g., wedding, birthday) and make a decision. Students may be asked to decide what they will wear or what gift they will bring with them. As an adaptation, students could also select an emotion or emoji face based on the text to express how the invitation makes them feel. To connect to writing, students could be provided with a sentence frame and complete the prompt "I would wear_____ to the party because ___."

A Healthy New Year
The purpose of this activity is to read about new year's resolutions in the target culture (e.g. news article, blog post, or infographic). Then, as a class, create a list of possible resolutions for a healthy new year. The class may brainstorm activities like: 10 minutes of reading, seven second planks, give three compliments, no candy, eat a bowl of veggies. Then, they can decide on a timeline (e.g. The Twelve Days of Wellness) and individually select their priorities. For example, on the first of the day, they may say give three compliments, on the second day, they may say 5 minutes of mediation. As they complete the tasks, they can color each goal to mark them as completed.

Moral of the Story
Make a deck of 24 cards depicting characters, events, or places related to a story. Each group member receives a few cards. In groups of two, one student flips up five cards and tells a story one-by-one. At the end of the story, the other student must decide on the moral of the story. To scaffold this task, the groups may be provided with speaking prompts or transitions.An example of a deck of cards comes from Sánchez, J. & Sanz, C. (1993). *Jugando en español: Actividades interactivas para la clase de español. Niveles elemental-intermedio.* Berlin: Langenscheidt.

Rating artwork
The class studies one artist and multiple piece of artwork from that one artist. Individually, students rate each piece of art as beautiful, meaningful, unique and/or creative using a rating scale. Then, as a group they negotiate which of the paintings the class should hang on the wall. They must decide on only one of the art pieces and justify their collective decision. Variation: Students can examine the same piece of artwork interpreted by different artists (e.g., Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez). The use of an evaluation matrix can help organize this decision (For more information, see Hlas, A.C. (2019). *Practical Creativity:Activities and Ideas for the Language Classroom.* San Diego: Cognella)

Appendix A: Making Banana Bread

Let's make banana bread—RECIPE—Person A

Ask your partner what ingredients they have in the kitchen. By looking at the recipe, decide what your group needs to buy to make the Banana Bread.

Banana Bread

2 cups of four
1 teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup butter
¾ cup brown sugar
2 eggs, beaten
3 ripe bananas

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease bread pan.

In a large bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt. In another bowl, mix butter and brown sugar. Stir in eggs and mash bananas. Stir all together and pour into pan.

Bake one hour.

Enjoy!
Recipe from All Recipes [http://allrecipes.com/recipe/20144/banana-banana-bread/]

Useful questions:
How much _____ do you have?
How much do we need?
Do we have enough?
Which ingredients do we need to purchase?

Grocery list

To make the banana bread, write down the exact measurements of the ingredients you still need to buy:
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Let's make banana bread--INGREDIENTS—Person B
In order to make Banana bread, decide what your group needs to buy. After speaking with your partner, write down what you still need to buy from the grocery.

Ingredient List

1 ½ cup flour
1 tablespoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup butter
½ cup brown sugar
6 eggs
One banana

Useful questions:
How much _____ do we need?
What does the recipe require?
Do we have enough?
How much of that ingredient do we need to purchase?

Grocery list

To make the banana bread, write down the exact measurements of the ingredients you still need to buy:
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Wildlife Rescue Center in Costa Rica

Student A

Focusing on the following places and prepositional phrases, map the Rescue Center.

Places:

Bathrooms		Monkey house	
Big Cats		Sainos	
Birdhouse		Snakes	
Crocodiles		Tapirs	

Prepositional phrases:

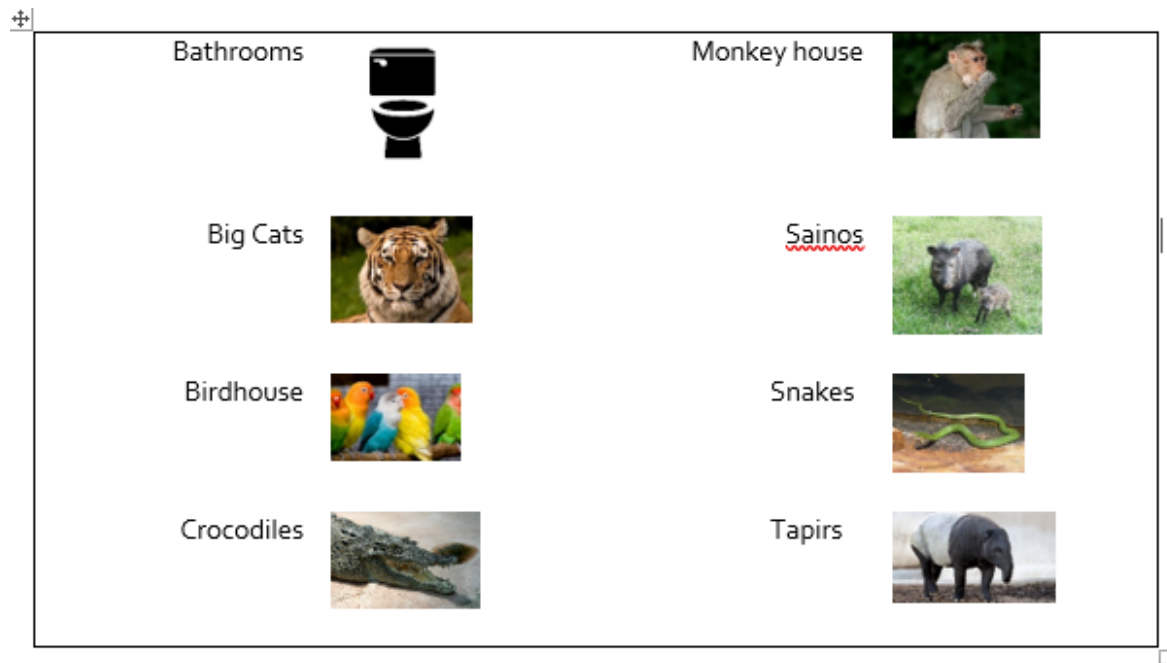| in the corner	next to	far from
between	close to	to the left of
to the right of	beside	alongside of

Clues:

1. Tapirs are between the bathrooms and the Snakes.

2. Sainos are beside the Big Cats.

3. The Monkey house is very far from the Birdhouse.

4. The Crocodiles are alongside of the pond.

Wildlife Rescue Center in Costa Rica

Student B

Focusing on the following places and prepositional phrases, map the Rescue Center.

**Places:**

Prepositional phrases:

in the corner	next to	far from
between	close to	to the left of
to the right of	beside	alongside of

Clues:

1. The Bird house has nothing to the left nor right.
2. The Monkey house is in the corner.
3. The Tapirs are very close to the bathrooms.
4. The Big Cats are next to the Entrance.

From Practical Creativity (2019) p. 153

Wildlife Rescue Center

Pond

Bathrooms

Main Entrance

http://www.zoocostarica.com/welcome1.html
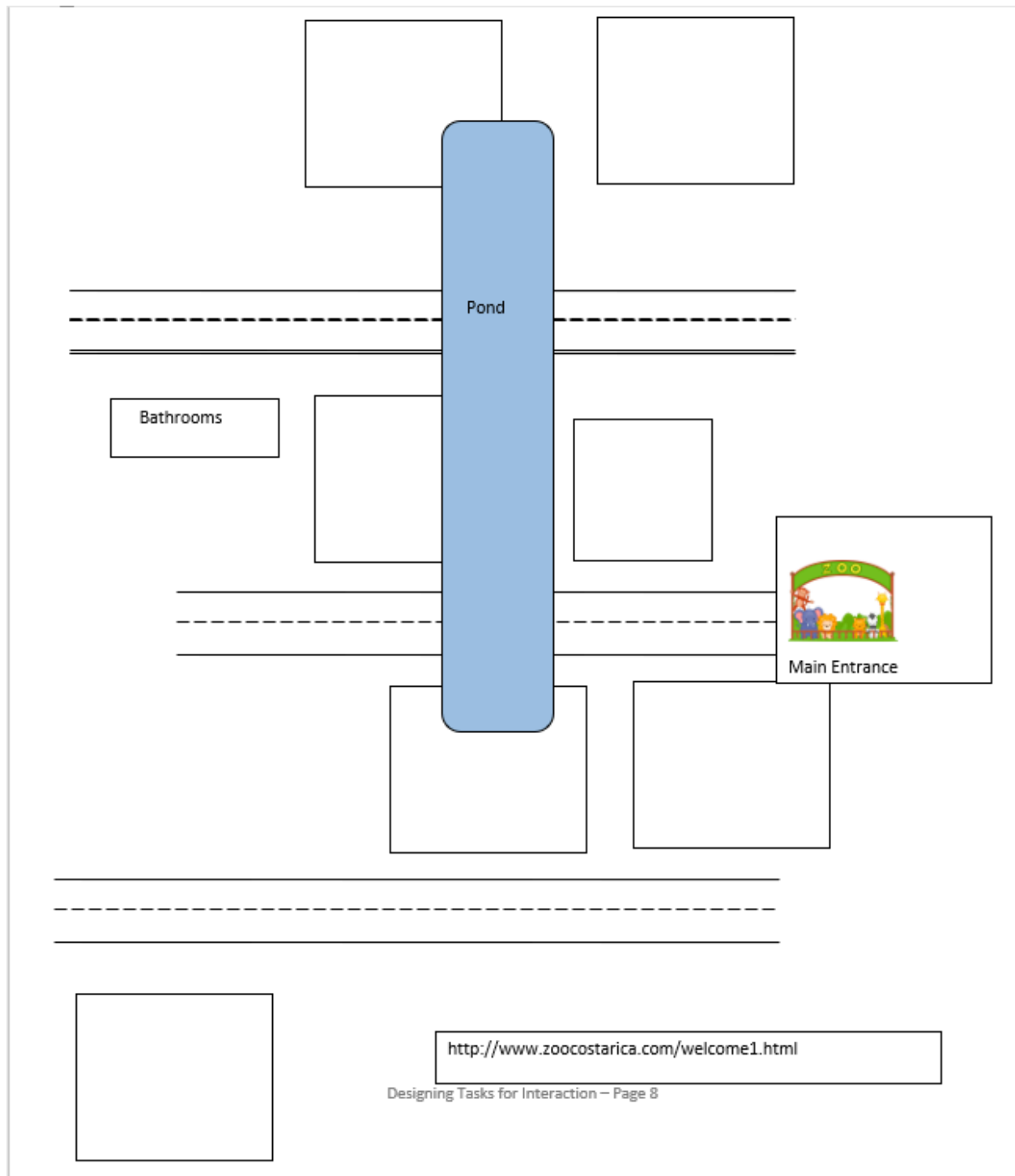
Appendix C: What Would You Do?

Input-oriented task—What would you do for $1000?[1]

Part 1. Individually, answer the following questions about what you would do for $1000 selecting all that apply. Be sure to answer yes or no and explain why you would or would not do it.

	I would lick the exhibit room floor.
	I would post a public YouTube video of me teaching.
	I would eat an entire lemon with peel in one sitting.
	I would crack an egg on my face and attend an ACTFL workshop.
	I would act like a monkey for a day.
	I would let a picture of myself go viral as a meme.
	I would read the last text I received out loud.
	I would shave my head.

Part II. Now, ask a classmate these questions about their risk-taking, if paid $1000. Note if your partner seems to lean more toward risk-taking or playing it safe.

1. Would you lick the exhibit room floor?
2. Would you post a YouTube video of yourself teaching?
3. Would you eat an entire lemon?
4. Would you crack an egg on your face?
5. Would you act like a monkey for a day?
6. Would you let a picture of yourself go viral as a meme?
7. Would you read the last text message you received out loud?
8. Would you shave your head?

Part III. Now, if there was an activity your partner would not do for $1000, ask them if they would for $100,000.

Part IV. Finally, together decide where you and your partner fall on the following scale in terms of their risk-taking.

       5   4   3   2   1

 Risk-taker zone   Comfort-zone

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[1] Format for this task from VanPatten, B. (2017) Episode 42. Tea with BVP.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8iJd3GKzNoza3ZxYnQ3WDY3YnM/view

Output-oriented task—What would you do for $1000?

Part 1. Individually, list 8-10 wacky things you would do for $1000.

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Part II. Then, ask and answer questions about what you and your partner would or would not do for $1000.

Part III. Now, if there was an activity your partner would not do for $1000, ask them if they would for $100,000.

Part IV. Finally, together decide where you and your partner fall on the following scale in terms of their risk-taking.

5   4   3   2   1

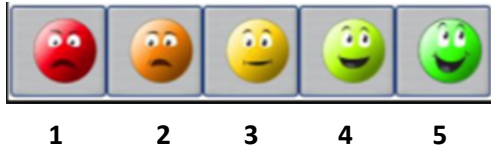Risk-taker zone   Comfort-zone

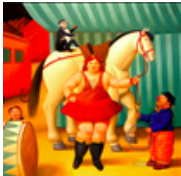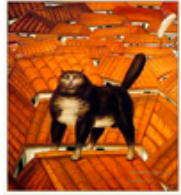Format for this task from VanPatten, B. (2017) Episode 42. Tea with BVP.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8iJd3GKzNoza3ZxYnQ3WDY3YnM/view

Appendix D:

Evaluation Matrix.

Rate the following paintings on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest value.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

	Beauty	**Meaning**	**Creativity**	**Uniqueness**	**Total**

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