Children and Tasks

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Abstract

A great deal of research has focused on tasks, particularly for adult second language learners. In this paper we provide an account of studies that have investigated children and tasks – an age group that have received far less attention. We consider, in particular, the impact of tasks on children's language learning, how their design features influence child interactions, and the implications and challenges surrounding task pedagogy with younger learners. We conclude with suggestions for future research. We draw extensively on the work of Rod Ellis, not only because tasks, interaction and language learning underpin his extensive body of work, but because he was one of the first to focus on children using tasks in the language learning domain.

Keywords: *Tasks, Children, Language Learning*

Introduction

For more than three decades task-based language teaching has received considerable international attention from researchers and practitioners. The ways tasks can facilitate language acquisition have been discussed, and task design, task types, and the integration of tasks into the syllabus have beeninvestigated (e.g., Ellis, 2003a; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006; Van den Branden, Samuda, & Bygate, 2018). Although this has been done taking into consideration the different proficiency levels of the learners, much less attention has been given to the age of the learners. This is despite growing awareness of the differences between adult and child SLA (see for example Azkarai & Oliver, 2018). Yet with increasing migration, the rapid uptake of online opportunities by younger generations, and implementation of compulsory foreign language teaching (especially English) in schools worldwide, task-based researchers

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have begun to focus on younger learners (e.g., see Azkarai & Garcia Mayo, 2017; Ellis & Heimbach, 1997; Garcia Mayo & Lazaro Ibarrola, 2015; Oliver, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2009; Shintani, 2011, 2012, 2014). This has included examining the implementation of tasks in the classrooms of school-aged learners (Butler & Zeng, 2013; Carless, 2002).The importance of such research has also been heightened given the recommendations for European schools in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) and integration oftasksinto school language curricula (e.g., in Belgium –Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006; Hong Kong–Carless, 2007; New Zealand–East, 2012 and Erlam & Ellis, 2018; and Australian schools – Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste, & Exell, 2013).

Although investigations of language learning through the use of tasks is most often associated with adult learners, early in the task-based field Prabhu (1987) reported on a large-scale task application that was undertaken in Indian secondary schools. Ellis, Oliver and others then followed, in turn, with case study and experimental research that involved the use of tasks (and opportunities to engender task-like behaviour) with children. Their research, however, was generally targeted atexplaining SLA with tasks being used as a means for data collection, rather than being the focus per se. It was not untillate 1990s and early 2000s that calls were made to distinguish between research into adult and child SLA, and more importantly the application of this research for pedagogical purposes, that task research began to explore aged differences (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2001; Oliver, 2000) and more specifically use of tasks by children (e.g.,Azkarai &Imaz Agirre, 2016; Azkarai & Oliver, 2018; Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Ellis & Heimbach, 1997; García Mayo, 2018; Mackey & Oliver, 2002; Mackey & Silver, 2005; Oliver, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2009; Oliver, Philp, & Duchesne, 2017; Pinter, 2006, 2007; Van den Branden, 1997).

A lot of this early child task-based research was based on the premise that interaction is key for SLA (Ellis, 1999; Gass & Mackey, 2006; Long, 1996) and it was found that for both children and adults tasks facilitate interaction and, therefore, SLA (e.g., Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Ellis, 1985; Oliver, 1998, 2002, 2009; Shintani & Ellis, 2014; Tognini, 2008). A particular focus of the earlier interactional studies included investigations of those conversational strategies that encompass negotiation of meaning (NfM) which involves the use of linguistic adjustments (e.g., repetition, clarification requests, confirmation and comprehension checks) to achieve mutual understanding between interlocutors. The consequence of using such adjustments is that inputis modified and made more comprehensible to learners, they are pushed to produce comprehensible output, and when that is not achieved, feedback is provided. In addition, tasks offer opportunities for learners to focus on form (Long, 1996) and to be provided with scaffolding (Ellis, 1999). In other words, tasks facilitate the type of interaction that promote language acquisition (e.g., Ellis, 1985; Long, 1996).

We begin this review with those research studies that suggest benefits of tasks for young learners' language development. Next, we describe how children participate in tasks and what design features of tasks have been found to impact young learners. We then look at how this promotes young learners' motivation and engagement, reflect on socio-cultural benefits for

younger learners, and explore teacher perspectives about children and tasks, seeking to address potential challenges for pedagogy, policy and classroom implementation. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

Tasks and Language Development in Children

Ellis was among the first to empirically investigate conversational interaction, and specifically different types of input, to identify its connection to and influence on second language acquisition (following claims made by Hatch, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Long, 1983, 1996), and many of his early studies involved school-aged children. For example, in 1985, he conducted a study on the interaction between a teacher and two of her students aged11 and 13, who had recently migrated from Pakistan (Ellis, 1985). Although not task-based in design, the way teacher interacted with the students using picture cards (e.g., "What's wrong cards") meant that it resembled task-like behaviour. Namely, and as defined by Ellis (2003, 2018), it involved a focus on meaning, with an activity that utilised learners' own linguistic resources, and it had a non-linguistic outcome. Over the course of 9 months both students were able to produce more language,and this appeared to occur because of the input and timely feedback provided by the teacher which served as building blocks for their utterances.

Later, Ellis conducted a series of studies that involved children doing tasks with an intention to investigate the connection between different types of input – baseline, pre-modified and interactionally modified input –and second language acquisition (Ellis & Heimbach, 1997; Ellis, Heimbach, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1999; Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994). Care was taken to adjust the tasks according to the age of children. The first of these studies was conducted in two Japanese cities, one with primary and the other withjunior high school students. Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994) found that the interaction facilitated comprehension, leading to more successful task completion. In addition, the results of all post-tests and delayed post-tests – carried out 2 days, 2 weeks and then 6 weeks after the treatment – revealed that interactionally modified input led to greater vocabulary acquisition than both pre-modified and baseline (control group) input, although this effect was more evident in a less prestigious school where learner proficiency levels may have been lower, and where they probably had fewer opportunities for private lessons and thus for additional learning. A further analysis of these findings included interrogation of the students' self-report of the items they had learned on task completion (Ellis, Heimbach, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1999). Ellis and his colleagues found an overall weak connection between comprehension of the directions and acquisition of the vocabulary items, which confirmed previous claims that comprehensible input on its own does not ensure acquisition (e.g., Long, 1996). They also concluded that while interactionally modified input was shown to be the most effective, it resulted in a slower rate of acquisition. In another study,the interactions of kindergarten children in an American school in Japan were explored (Ellis & Heimbach, 1997). Here again the results indicated that negotiation facilitated comprehension, and that this was more effective when children worked in groups. The findings did show that individual children differed in their involvement, their readiness and ability to negotiate (e.g.,

some asked more questions, while others did not engage in negotiation at all), but that there was no apparent connection between these patterns and their acquisition of new words. It was also found that it was easier for children to participate in the negotiation process with their teacher when they worked in groups,than when they worked individually with the teacher.

Similar outcomes were reported by Van den Branden (2000) who looked at the influence of the types of input and the interactional context on reading comprehension. He used a detective story followed by a comprehension test where students had to decide on the direction the main character should take based on the clues provided in the text. A total of 151 primary school students aged 10-12 from eight Flemish schools participated in the study doing a task which was based on different chapters from a book, under four different conditions: with pre-modified input (simplified vocabulary and syntax, with repetitions) working individually, with unmodified input working individually, with collective negotiation and with pair negotiation. He found that pre-modified input lead to higher comprehension than unmodified input when working individually, however, the highest comprehension recorded in the study was with unmodified input in the collective negotiation condition.

Oliver (1995; 1998; 2000; 2009) also used tasks to investigate the contribution of interaction to child SLA (the details of this body of work is described below). Like Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994), and Ellis and Heimbach (1997), she found that the negotiation and feedback emanating from task-based interaction between child learnersand between children and their teachers appeared to impact onthe development of their interlanguage. This was tested in a study by Mackey and Oliver (2002) who used tasks to study the effects of interactional feedback on the development of question formation in ESL children, using the developmental stages outlined by Pienemann and Johnston (1987). The experimental study involved 26 ESL child learners aged 8-12 years. The learners worked one-on-one with an adult on information gap tasks, including spot-the-difference, story completion, picture placement, and picture sequencing tasks. In the experimental group, participants were provided with various types of feedback (e.g., negotiation, recasts, repetition), whereas in the control group there was an absence of such feedback. Prior to engaging in the tasks, a pre-test was administered, and then afterwards three post-tests: one immediately after treatment, then 3 days and 3 weeks later. Both immediate and delayed post-tests revealed the development of the learners' interlanguage (i.e., the treatment group started using higher order questions, and that use was evident immediately). Similar results were also obtained by Mackey and Silver (2005) in the multilingual context of Singapore with Chinese as their children's L1. Note these results contrast to similar studies with adult learners where differences between the experimental and control groups were not apparent until the post-tests.

The apparent advantage for children in terms of more immediate uptake were not, however, found in Van den Branden's (1997) study. Even so, he did find that the feedback children received and the output they produced when working on tasks did have subsequent effects on their output production (as shown in a post-test), which he noted illustrates the potential of negotiation to facilitate child SLA: "Having interacted with an interlocutor who indicated the gaps and inconsistencies in their stories, who pushed them and cooperated with them to fill these

gaps, the pupils were far better equipped to produce a description of the drawings on their own afterwards" (p.629). Similarly, Oliver, Philp and Duchesne (2017) also found evidence of incidental focus on form as school-aged children worked on two-way information gap tasks, with learners modifying their language in response to negotiation or when engaged in language play. Despite this body of evidence, it is important to note that other studies suggest there are certain limits to the influence of interaction on child SLA. For example, Sato (1990) described the variable influence of interaction on the development of interlanguage, particularly when there is insufficient input for development, in the case of her study, of children's morphosyntax. However, Sato's longitudinal study of two Vietnamese boys was undertaken in anaturalistic ESL environment and did not involve investigation of task-like activities such as those that occur within instructed SLA settings.

Children and Task Interaction
There is now a substantial body of evidence showing that young learners across a wide age range and using a variety of languages are able to negotiate for meaning both in instructional contexts or laboratory settings (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Azkarai & Oliver, 2018; García Mayo, 2018; Oliver, 1998, 2002, 2009; Shintani, 2012). In their interaction, these learners use the strategies that are utilised by adults, but it does seem to happenin different ways and to a different extent.

    For example, in a series of studies Oliver (1995; 1998; 2002) investigated how children interact when doing tasks, commencing withstudies that addressed the questions of whether or not and how they negotiated for meaning and what factors affected this. In her 1998 study she compared her results to those found with adult learners. Her research involved 96 dyads in Australian middle and upper primary schools working on one-way and two-way language tasks. The participants were paired according to native (NS) and non-native (NNS) status into three types of pairs: NS-NNS, NNS-NNS, and NS-NS and within the NNS groups according to proficiency, high (H) and low (L): H-H, H-L and L-L. She found that children do negotiate for meaning with their peers of the same age, using a range of strategies. For instance, just as adults do, they use conversational adjustments and repetition both of their own and their interlocutors' utterances; they utilised clarification requests and confirmation checks, but considerably more often than they did comprehension checks (at 5.71%, 5.72% and 0.86% respectively). These results differed proportionally from the results of adult studies (e.g., Long, 1983).

    When examining a smaller data set from the larger cohort, Oliver (1995) discovered that just as adults do, children who are native speakers of English also can and do modify their input in the process of interaction with NNS peers to facilitate their understanding. Her findings indicated that child NS learners provided feedback more often than they ignored the error (61% compared to 39%). Overall, Oliver (1998) concluded that "in spite of children's inherently egocentric nature, they can fulfil their responsibility in a conversation" (p. 376). However, unlike the findings from adult studies, age and gender did not significantly influence interaction of children when working on tasks. In another related study, which made a direct comparison of adult and

child dyads working on the same tasks, Oliver (2000) found that although adult learners provided more negative feedback, both age groups incorporated this feedback when given a chance and if it was appropriate to do so. Regardless of age, the lower the proficiency of the dyad, the greater the frequency of feedback. She suggested that especially with regard to the younger learners, they may benefit from such feedback in the long term because of its accumulative contribution to their acquisition.

Pinter (2006) also compared child and adult interaction, and in particular, she examined the strategies the learners used when undertaking a Spot-the-differences task both in their first language (L1 - Hungarian) and then in their L2, English. She found her child participants (aged 10 years) located only four out of six differences when using their L1, and on average only 2.8 in English, while for adults the number was higher, and there was less difference between L1 and L2 – 6 and 5.5 respectively. Pinter describes the range of interactional strategies and strategic approaches taken by the participants: "The children were able to respond to each other, clarify messages, keep tally of the differences and they interacted confidently on the task but with regard to the listed strategies, the adult learners used them to a larger extent" (p. 574). However, in a later study where Pinter (2007) examined the interaction of just two 10-year old boys, she found greater evidence of collaboration and assistance (in a way used by the adult learners in her previous study). She explains that much of this had to do with the support provided by the more advanced interlocutor in the dyad. Even so, as Ellis (2003, 2015) has highlighted, age does seem to affect the type of interaction that occurs in tasks.

To explore the issue of age differences further, Mackey, Oliver and Leeman (2003) examined the feedback and modified output produced by adult and child learners when working on tasks. For both the adults and children 24 dyads (48 dyads in total) were age and gender matched to form 12 NS-NNS and 12 NNS-NNS pairs. All dyads worked on two tasks in a counter-balanced design. The findings indicated that in both groups, there were ample opportunities for learners to produce modified output and this was prompted and supported by the feedback they received within the interactions. In addition, it was found that the children were given more opportunities to produce modified output in response to feedback, especially when working with an NNS partner. However, this difference was not evident in the adults.

Not only are there differences between adults and children, age differences also have been found between younger and older children. Although children as young as five years of age have beenshown to be able to negotiate for meaning and to provide feedback to each other (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Oliver, 2009), it was also apparent that they did so in different ways from their older counterparts. For instance, they were found to be more liberal with the truth and less bound by the strictures of the task (Oliver, 2009). Research also suggests that primary school children give less consideration to their partners (Bagheri, Rahimi, & Riasati, 2012; Oliver, 2009) than do those who are older. However, Bagheri et al. (2012) found in their study that over time, even with younger learners "their interpretation had moved on from 'an individual task' to 'a joint game' and they had learnt to take notice and build on each other's utterances" (p. 950) in way that older learners do. Hence it appears that increasing familiarity with tasks, even for

young learners, allows them to interact in ways that facilitate their interaction and so, in the longer term, their acquisition.

One type of feedback included in a number of studies described above are recasts. As Ellis (2015) describes it, these are a type of corrective feedback in which the learner's meaning remains unchanged, but the form is implicitly corrected. For instance, in a study with adults Sheen (2006) examined the provision and use of different categories of recasts. Following this, Oliver and Grote (2010) replicated the study, but with young learners aged 10-13 who worked either in pairs or with a teacher on information-gap tasks. The comparison showed that multiple-move recasts (i.e., those addressing more than one error within the same recast) were used considerably more by adults, while the majority of recasts provided to children consisted of single-moves. Adult learners also received more reduced recasts (those shorter than the original utterance) than did the children, especially when working with their teachers.

Researchers who have focused on children have also studied other aspects of interaction. Van den Branden (1997), for example, examined learner output, analysing the interaction of 5th grade children learning Dutch in a Flemish primary school in Belgium. To achieve this, he used an information-gap and decision-making task where each partner received information about two of the four suspects and had to exchange this information and negotiate in order to solve a murder. One group of 16 students formed 8 NS-NNS dyads, another group of 16 students took turns working as apair with their teacher (the researcher), and athird group were the control. Van den Branden found that children negotiated for meaning rather than form and modified their output regardless of who they worked with. However, the modification made to their output was dependent on the type of feedback they received.

Exploring the nature of interaction in different child learning contexts was the focus of the study by Garcia Mayo and Lazaro Ibarrola (2015). They compared the interaction of child dyads working in a Content Language Integrate Learning (CLIL) context compared to those studying in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in Spain. In each setting, 20 dyads consisting of 10 children aged 8-9 years and 10 children aged 10-11 years worked on an information-gap task. Although both groups had beginner level proficiency, they found that many more conversational adjustments were made and less L1 was used by the CLIL students compared to EFL learners. Age differences were also apparent with older students using fewer conversational adjustments and repetitions, but employing more L1 in both the CLIL and EFL settings. In a follow up study Azkarai and Lazaro Ibarrola (2016) investigated the interactions of same participants, but one year later. In this study they used a one-way guessing game task, and a two-way placement task. Their findings indicated that in addition to age and context, task types also had an impact on the interaction that occurred.

These studies provided an important insight into the way learners of different ages, in different learning contexts, andusing different types of tasks participate in interaction. While all age groups utilised a variety of strategies to negotiate and to provide feedback, they did so in different ways and to a lesser or greater extent. How the interactional context, and specifically the design of the task(s), actually influences childSLA isexplored next.

Design Features of Tasks for Young Learners

As will be discussed in the sections below, the way a task is actually performed by learners will differ depending on the context, learners' age, and also other factors such as proficiency, ability, personalities and motivation. Ellis (2000) notes that in addition to this, task design also impacts on what occurs in the interaction. Ellis's (1985) own early research described how the opportunity for control within a task (e.g., over the choice of a topic, receiving and giving feedback) influenced the resultant interaction. Other factors of task design include familiarity with content and procedure (e.g., Mackey, Kanganas, & Oliver, 2007), task repetition (e.g., Azkarai & Garcia Mayo, 2017), and task types. For instance, Ellis (2003a) points out how Prabhu opted for the type of tasks that included more oral input and picture-based activities (with charts and diagrams) with his school-aged learners in India to cater for their low proficiency level.

Earlier we have described various task types such as information gap (e.g., spot-the-difference), decision-making, and one-way versus two-way tasks. More recently, Ellis (2009) has categorised tasks as 'input-providing' or 'output-promoting', or 'input-based' and 'output-based' (Ellis, 2018).While most studies involving adults focus on the output-based tasks (see Plonsky & Kim, 2016 for the review; with some exceptions such as Malekshani & Harsini, 2017), there was much less research in the input-based tasks with young, beginner learners. One exception includes a study by Shintani (2012) who investigated input-based tasks with young EFL learners in Japan. She found thesix-year old participants not only responded to the teacher's questions when working on a listen-and-do task, but also initiated questions, producing even more of those than did their teacher: 426 student-initiated questions over the course of nine lessons. She concluded that these tasks can be successfully used with young learners as they create contexts for incidental language acquisition. Another study by Erlam and Ellis (2018) involved 34 year 9 learners of French as L2 in a public school in New Zealand. Two in-tact classes were involved in the study: one received instruction with the use of the listen-and-do tasks for two lessons, while the other served as a control group. A pre-test, a post-test and a delayed post-test was then used to measure acquisition of plural markers in French. The results indicated that input-based tasks led to greater acquisition of both receptive and productive knowledge (although comparison of the latter was limited by a smaller size of the cohort). However, it was suggested that longer exposure (than 1.5 hours in the study) may be needed for grammar items to be retained upon implicit instruction. Overall, like Shintani (2012), they concluded that input-based tasks are beneficial for beginner learners as they provide opportunities for incidental acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, creating what they called an "acquisition-rich classroom" (p. 20).

In addition to type of task, the task conditions employed may also influence how learners interact. For example, Oliver, Philp, and Mackey (2008) found that pre-task instructions influence the learners' interactions during task performance (Oliver, Philp, & Mackey, 2008) and

that the impact varies according to the age of the learners. For instance, receiving pre-task and especially on-task examples was helpful for the older learners' production of modified output, however, the examples seemed to act as an intrusion in case of younger learners.

The beneficial effect of task repetition has received considerable attention in the adult SLA context (e.g., Ellis, 2003b; Lopes, 2004; Lynch & Maclean, 2000, 2001; Plough & Gass, 1993). It is proposed that it allows L2 learners to "have more processing space available for formulating the language needed to express their ideas" (Ellis, 2003b, p. 246). Further, it provides learners with an opportunity to think through what they want to say and how to say that (i.e., what language to use). It has also been noted that while the first time a task is performed, the learners' focus is on the meaning, the focus on form can be achieved in the following iterations (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Research with child learners also shows improvement in task performance with task repetition. In Pinter's (2007) study detailed above, she found that her 10-year-old Hungarian-speaking participants became more confident in their use of English and used their L1 less frequently when the tasks were repeated. Analysing the task performance ofher 6-year-old beginner EFL learners, Shintani (2012) also found that students' social speech significantly increased when the task was repeated. She then contrasted her students' active questioning in the input-based task with the results from Ellis and Heimbach's (1997) study where very few students participated in negotiation despite being encouraged to do so. She attributes this difference to the fact that the task was done only once in their study and concludes that task familiarity through repetition facilitates negotiation of meaning.

Investigating the effect of task familiarity with ESL learners aged 7-8.5 working in dyads on four communicative tasks, Mackey, Kanganas and Oliver (2007) found that working on unfamiliar tasks (whether because of procedure or topic) yielded more clarification requests, confirmation checks, and negative feedback on initial non-target-like utterances. In turn, familiarity with the task procedure resulted in more opportunities to utilise feedback, and familiarity with both the procedure and the content helped learners make use of the feedback they received. Azkarai and Garcia Mayo (2017) also utilised task repetition to examine the use of L1 by Spanish EFL learners aged 9-10-years as they worked in dyads on spot-the-difference tasks. The students performed the same task and then half of the group worked on exactly the same task three months later, and the other half did a similar task, but one that differed in content. Their findings revealed that, for both groups, the use of L1 considerably decreased when the task was repeated suggesting that increased familiarity with the task meant that learners needed to rely less on their L1. However, the group that completed the same task used L1 more often than the other group on both occasions, but they also employed more confirmation checks and metacognitive talk in the second instance, which Azkarai and Garcia Mayo (2017) believe illustrated an increased engagement with the task for that group.

In order to design tasks appropriate to the learners it has been proposed that a Needs Analysis (NA) should be undertaken (Long, 2005). Although most published NAs focus on adults, there are studies showing that younger learners can contribute to the process and are capable of indicating their interests and goals (Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste, & Exell, 2013; Pinter, 2014;

Pinter, Kuchah & Smith, 2013). This also supports the proposition that younger learners, rather than being passive recipients in the teaching and learning process, can be active participants of knowledge co-construction. Furthermore, incorporating task-based approaches with children and adolescents and having them contribute to the design and implementation of the syllabus provides opportunities for learner development, beyond simply their second language learning. In this regard, researchers have examined the experiences of teachers and theiryounger learners when task approaches are used, providing insight into the benefits as well as challenges in these contexts (Carless, 2003; East, 2012; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Oliver & Bogachenko, 2018).

One such example is a review of the task-based syllabus developed for primary and secondary schools in Belgium by Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006). The syllabus developers considered the need to develop these learners' proficiency in the academic language to allow them successfully participate in other subjects taught at school in L2. They also considered the age of the students and developed tasks that would be interesting and motivating for students of different ages. They provide ideas such as pseudo-scientific texts and problem-solving for older primary students and using story lines, such as creating a story about the footprints found in the classroom or in a time machine. Like Van den Branden (2000) in Flemish schools, they found the creative use of different task types increased learner engagement and motivation. This is a topic we turn to in the next section.

Task Engagement and Motivation
Research has shown there are various ways in which tasks can engage and motivate young learners (e.g., Philp, Oliver, & Mackey, 2006; Mackey et al., 2003; Oliver, Philp, & Duchesne, 2017). According to Long (2015), activities that focus on meaning rather than language forms, such as tasks, can be more engaging and motivating as they allow learners to communicate about something that is of interest for them or is relevant to their needs outside the classroom. For child learners, the nature of tasks aligns closely with their behaviour as language learners. For instance, they are more spontaneous than adults and tend to be more likely to take risks, use their imagination and are more willing to provide feedback than are their adult counterparts, and so tasks can build upon these characteristics and be incorporated into the procedure (Oliver, 2000). In this vein it has been proposed that tasks should allow children to use language for play and to play with language (Philp, Oliver & Mackey, 2008).

Such language play emerged in the study by Oliver, Philp and Duchesne (2017). Their study also provides a rich description of what task engagement looks like for children. It involved 42 primary school ESL learners from different backgrounds – paired to form 11 dyads aged 5-7, and 10 dyads aged 11-12. The participants worked on five two-way information-gap tasks, one each during five sessions over the course of two weeks. As they interacted to achieve the task outcome, they actively engaged socially, linguistically and cognitively. They did this by: complimenting each other, providing reciprocal support when choosing words, listening canrefully to each other, showing willingness to work together, helping each other by clarifying ideas, undertaking conflict resolution and then moving on in positive ways, expressing their

enjoyment to each other explicitly and by means of non-verbal indicators such as laughter, staying on task (with the exception of only 5% of the turns), and by engaging in the type of talk that demonstrated they were thinking about and analysing the task and its content.

As Dörnyei (1997) explains, cohesiveness and collaboration in the classroom activities can be "particularly strong in language classes in which the learners' communicative skills are developed primarily through participatory experience in real world language tasks" (p. 485) and it seems that this is equally true for children as it is for adults. Furthermore, "stimulating, enjoyable, and relevant tasks" are a way to motivate learners (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p. 58). This was demonstrated in a study by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) who examined the effects of teachers using motivational strategies (including task-like lesson activities such as students' doing research and producing a poster or a brochure, talking about their personal experiences etc.) on Korean high school students' engagement.

Exemplifying this further by way of a case study, Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006) describe year two students engaging in a highly motivating task where they read the letters other children sent to a magazine sharing their problems and asking for advice. The researchers also provide an anecdotal account of another task where "the pupils, upon turning the wheel of a time machine, found a mysterious message consisting of three words: 'great, green and extinct'" and the teacher asked them to make guesses what this can be about and bring such things to school the next day (Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006, p. 83).

In their study with 44 secondary school students in Hungary, Kormos and Dörnyei (2004) found that the more motivated the students were in doing the task, the more talk they were likely to produce. Further, their positive attitudes to the task and the course in general helped them engage in pair work even with at times less active interlocutor. Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006) suggest for tasks to be motivating, it is important that they provide enough challenge, targeting the learners' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). To achieve this, they suggest using information-gap tasks that require interaction in order to achieve the outcome. Likewise, Van den Branden (2000) warns against tasks containing information that is too simple as they will be too easy for stronger students and does not foster sufficient opportunities for language learning. Instead, he refers to (Ellis, 2018) where the creation of a gap necessitates negotiation, although it should also be noted how this is achieved will be different for every student (Ellis, 2003b). Such individual variation is touched upon within the next section.

Tasks and Socio-Cultural Benefits for Children

To here we have explored the contribution of tasks from an interactional perspective and in terms of engagement and motivation, yet those subscribing to a socio-cultural perspective also see the value of tasks for second language learners. In this respect, task-based research has addressed how tasks can be used to mediate learning as learners participate in and are given opportunities for scaffolding and collaboration (Ellis, 2003b). For example, Ellis (2003b) refers to his 1985 study (outlined above) where one learner's language was scaffolded and her final utterance modified in response to the teacher's feedback. He also refers to Coughlan and Duff's (1994)

research where a Cambodian ESL learner worked on the same task (picture description) twice in one study, and secondary school EFL learners did the same task in Hungary in another study, and each time the way it was interpreted and performedwas different. Thus, Ellis shows how school-aged students, with varying degrees of success, are able to engage in tasks and to create an "extensive metatalk" about the ways to approach and complete it, arriving at a unique solution each time.

Reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) perspective that learning is a result of social interaction in the process of constructing knowledge, Storch (2002) suggests that language learners negotiate relationships as well as meaning. She then describes the pattern of interaction of her adult participants in terms of how well they participate in language-related episodes (LRE) during their interactions. Supporting Storch (2002), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) suggest it can be applied in a range of language learning settings and indeed, a few studies have used Storch's model to analyse the dyadic interaction of young learners when doing tasks. The first by Ives (2004) was done in an Australian ESL context with upper primary school aged students. Her analysis focuses on the mutuality, equality, opportunities and missed opportunities for language learning. The findings suggest that deliberate pairing does not necessarily lead to better opportunities for language learning, but rather these opportunities seem to depend on the temperaments and learning styles of the participants. She points out that assessing activities only by the end product, teachers may miss the conditions that either promote or restrict opportunities for language production, and so she encourages teachers to use Storch's (2002) model to identify opportunities language learning can be facilitated in the classroom.

Butler and Zeng (2015) applied Storch's (2002) model in their investigation of task-based interactions of the elementary school EFL students in China. Two age groups were involved - year 4 and 6 students with 24 participants in each group. The learners were paired to make 12 gender-matched dyads (6 male and 6 female). Decision making tasks were used – and then a comparison made of learner interactions in their L1and L2 (English). Butler and Zeng (2015) found that interactional patterns changed slightly according to the language used with the younger learners. There were also differences in mutuality and engagement according to age, with L1 interaction of younger learners characterised by active participation on the part of both interlocutors, but little engagement with each other and a lot of crosstalk, while FL interaction resulted in low participation and lack of mutual engagement. In contrast, older learners adopted the *collaborative* pattern in both languages.

Another study based on Storch's (2002) model was undertaken by Oliver and Azkarai (2019). They examined the interaction patterns of young ESL learners of different levels of proficiency working with English NSs on one-way and two-way tasks. Proficiency level and type of task were found to influence the pattern of interaction in relation to the number of dyads that followed each pattern, but there was also a variety of patterns. Oliver and Azkarai also found high levels of mutuality and equality, although low proficiency learners were found to be more passive in their interactions.

The social aspect of task interaction as illustrated in the studies described above, highlight the complexity that teachers need to consider in order to enhance opportunities for scaffolding and for interaction more generally. Further considerations that teachers need to take in account when designing, selecting and using tasks with children are outlined next.

Further Considerations for Teachers of Children
As indicated both in published literature and as based on anecdotal accounts of practitioners, when selecting or designing tasks for young learners,there are a number of potential challenges that teachers need to consider. As a consequence difficulties may arise for the teachers of school-aged children with regard to the teaching approaches and resources they select or, as is the case in contexts were such decisions centrally made in a top-down manner, how these are implemented (Bogachenko, 2016; Kennedy, 2013; Nation & Macalister, 2010). This can make it for teachers implementing task-based approaches. Another challenge for teachers is a lack of assessment protocols that match a task-based approach. This means teachers will either need to use assessments that lack construct validity or design different – or additional – assessment items (Carless, 2007; Cheng & Samuel, 2011; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010).

Other practical challenges include noisy classrooms, which may be frowned upon in some school contexts (Adams & Newton, 2009; Carless, 2004; Hui, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Further, the freedom of interaction integral to communication tasks may lead to the overuse of L1, as reported in some studies with children (e.g., Carless, 2002, 2008 in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong; Ilin et al., 2007 with primary school children in Turkey;Jeon & Hahn, 2006 in Koreansecondary schools). According to Rosa (2004), students, and especially young learners, may find it hard to understand the need to communicate in another language if they can use their L1 to effectively express themselves in their monolingual group. However, it is important to note that it is possible to address these challenges (Carless, 2002; Zheng & Borg, 2014). For example,Carless (2002) outlines how teachers can be a role model for the use of the target language.

Based on her own teaching experience with young EFL learners in Japan, Shintani (2014) in particular, emphasises the important role of the teacher when using tasks. She suggests teachers should encourage negotiation by providing the time to elaborate and using non-verbal communication. Shintani (2014) also describes the importance of outlining a clear task outcome and indicating how and when it has been reached. She maintains that the use of L1 should be allowed in task performance, but teachers should use as much of the target language as possible in their own production.

In contrast to most adult language learning settings where classes and groups are mainly based on the proficiency placement, schools often have mixed ability classrooms, which may also be challenging for teachers when selecting and using tasks (Bogachenko, 2016; Zheng & Borg, 2014). Selecting tasks suitable for a heterogeneous group of students can be particularly problematic (Lambert, 2010). The group dynamics of such heterogeneity also can present difficulties for teachers. For instance, in Ukraine school teachers indicated that higher

proficiency students would refuse to work with low proficiency peers, who in turn would "hide behind the backs" of others in group and pair work (Bogachenko, 2016). Despite this, Ellis (2009) promotes the use of tasks suggesting they have the potential to benefit all learners regardless of levels of proficiency and age. He further suggests, the way pair and group work is organised can be manipulated to achieve the desired results.

Finally, while teaching resources such as visuals and realia are especially relevant in child teaching contexts, some schools may be less well equipped to provide such options. Many schools, and especially those in non-Western contexts, may experience lack of resources and higher teacher workloads (Bogachenko, 2016; Brandle, 2008). In this way, there can often be a need for teachers to spend time looking for and creating resources, and this may be perceived as an additional burdenfor teachers (Brandle, 2008; Erlam & Ellis, 2018; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Zhang, 2007). One way to address this is to use mainstream textbooks with activities that can be adapted to be more task-like (e.g., see Najjari, 2014; Wicking, 2009). Another possibility is to use what is available and focus on providing opportunities for interaction as Prabhu (1987) was able to do and as demonstrated at the beginning of this line of investigation into children using tasks.

Future Research

Clearly, there is still much work to do. In particular, further investigations are needed of how tasks can be successfully used in school settings with younger learners, especially if we are to inform effective task-based and task-like practices in these contexts. Such knowledge is crucial for practitioners as they attempt to cater for different learners of different ages and in different contexts. Furthermore, studies are needed to help teachers understand tasks better, to learn how to adjust them for their students' needs and to encourage them to implement tasks in ways that increase their effectiveness. Research is also needed to equip curriculum planners and educators in devising appropriate assessment in the settings where tasks are used; task types and designs for young learners of different proficiency levels; classroom management during task activities in classroom contexts; and tasks for mixed ability classes.Such research can be further supported by more informed teacher educationpractices around the use of tasks, as suggested recently by Erlam and Ellis (2018).

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