Table 7.2 Differences in task-based language teaching approaches

Features	Long (1985, 2015)	Willis (1996) and Willis and Willis (2007)	Skehan (1998)	Ellis (2003)
Natural language use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course design	Target-tasks → pedagogic tasks	Pedagogic tasks	Pedagogic tasks	Pedagogic tasks
Task type	Primarily *unfocused tasks* (i.e., tasks not aimed at eliciting specific target features)	Unfocused	Unfocused	Unfocused and *focused tasks*
Task modality	Output-based	Output-based	Output-based	Both input-based and output-based
Focus on form	Yes—main task phase (negotiation of meaning)	Yes—posttask phase	Yes—pretask phase (strategic planning)	Yes—all phases
Learner-centeredness	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not necessarily
Rejection of traditional approaches	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

1. What is common to all four approaches is the emphasis on natural language use. That is, TBLT aims to promote language learning by means of tasks that create interactionally authentic contexts for the use of language. In other respects, however, the four approaches differ.

2. Long (1985, 2015) argues that the design of a task-based course should start from a needs analysis to identify the *target tasks* that a specific group of learners will need to master. *Pedagogic tasks* are then developed from the target tasks. In contrast, Ellis (2003), Skehan (1998), and Willis (1996) see no need to take target tasks as the starting point and instead propose that a course be composed of pedagogic tasks matched to learners' developing language proficiency.

3. Tasks can be unfocused (i.e., designed to elicit general samples of language use) or focused (i.e., designed to provide a communicative context for the use of specific linguistic features, such as a set of words or a particular grammatical feature). Only Ellis (2003) suggests that some tasks can be of the focused kind.

4. In general advocates of TBLT view tasks as creating opportunity for language production (i.e., as output based). Ellis, however, has argued that input-based tasks (i.e., tasks involving listening or reading) have an important role to play in TBLT, especially for beginner level learners.

5. All four approaches recognize that a *focus-on-form* is a necessary feature of TBLT, but they differ in how this should be achieved. Long sees a focus on form arising primarily out of the negotiation of meaning that takes place when a communication problem arises. Willis relegates attention to form to the posttask phase of a lesson and insists that in the main task phase (i.e., when the task is being performed) the focus should be entirely on meaning. Skehan emphasizes the importance of planning in the pretask phase of the lesson as a way of enabling learners to pay greater attention to form when they perform the task. Ellis sees opportunities for a focus on form in all phases of a task-based lesson.

6. TBLT is generally characterized as a learner-centred approach with learners performing tasks interactively in small groups. This is reflected in Long's, Willis's, and Skehan's accounts of TBLT. Ellis, however, does not see group work as an essential feature of TBLT, arguing that tasks can be performed in a whole-class context with the teacher functioning as a participant in the task.

7. Advocates of TBLT tend to dismiss traditional approaches to language teaching such as PPP. Ellis, however, suggests that a modular approach is possible, with TBLT and traditional, language-centered approaches constituting separate and unconnected modules in a complete course. In this respect he is more in line with the role assigned to tasks in early CLT (see earlier in this chapter)