TEACHER TALKS at RMIT Vietnam

From Participation to Engagement

Redesigning English Tasks with ICAP

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Today’s workshop journey

A practical route from noticing participation to redesigning tasks.

1 Notice
Levels of engagement

2 Define
Passive, Active, Constructive, Interactive

3 Classify
Sort familiar ELT tasks

4 Redesign
Climb the ICAP ladder

5 Review
Score, revise, take away

By the end, you can analyse learner engagement beyond visible participation.

You will practise classifying and redesigning familiar ELT tasks using ICAP.

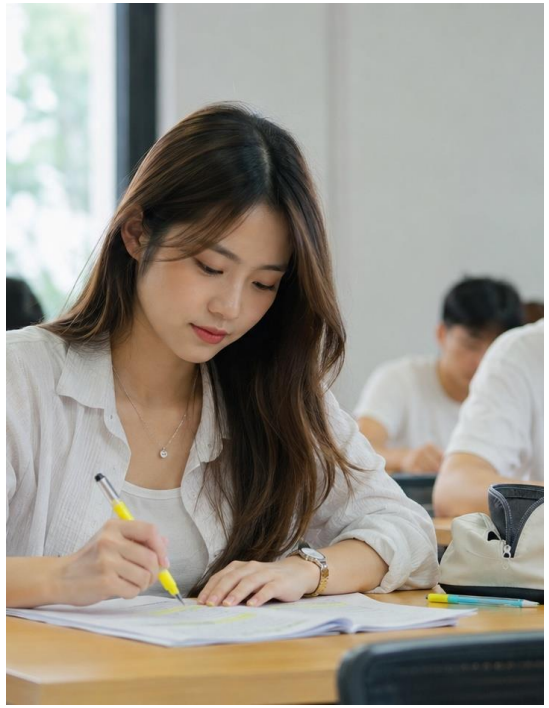
You will leave with practical strategies to design tasks for deeper engagement.

Lead-in: Which class looks most engaged?

Vote quickly, then tell your partner why you chose it.



A



B



C



D

They ALL look engaged. But are they equally cognitively engaged?

The surprise

Visible behavious is only a starting clue — NOT the whole diagnosis.

A learner may look attentive...
but still be copying without processing.

A group may look lively...
but might only be recycling given information without elaborating on it.

So the question becomes:

What are learners actually doing with the information?

ICAP gives us a practical language for describing that difference.

The ICAP lens

Four modes of engagement, described through learner behaviour (Chi et al., 2018)

P

Passive
Learner receives information

Example: Listen to teacher explanation

A

Active
Learner manipulates given information

Example: Underline key words

C

Constructive
Learner generates new ideas

Example: Give a new example, compare

I

Interactive
Learner co-constructs with others

Example: Negotiate a shared answer

Shallow Processing Strategies (Hands-on)

Deep Processing Strategies (Minds-on)

Chi, M. T. H., Adams, J., Bogusch, E. B., Bruchok, C., Kang, S., Lancaster, M., Levy, R., Li, N., McEldoon, K. L., Stump, G. S., Wylie, R., Xu, D., & Yaghmourian, D. L. (2018). Translating the ICAP theory of cognitive engagement into practice. Cognitive Science, 42(6), 1777–1832. https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.12626

ICAP in an ELT class

Different tasks, different cognitive demands.

Passive
Students listen to a dialogue from an audio.

Active
Students highlight useful expressions in the transcript.

Constructive
Students individually adapt the expressions to a new situation.

Interactive
Students co-create a shared dialogue by building on one another's ideas.

Key takeaway: Focus on what learners DO with the information, NOT what the task looks like.

Practice: classify the tasks

Work with a partner or small group. Use learner behaviour as evidence.

Step 1
Sort the familiar ELT tasks into Passive, Active, Constructive, or Interactive.

Step 2
Justify your classification: what are learners doing with the information?

Step 3
Discuss one ambiguous task: how could enactment move it up or down?

You have 6 minutes. Be ready to explain one difficult decision.

Task cards for classification

Where would you place each task (I-C-A-P)? Why?

Reading
Students read a text silently.

P

Vocabulary
Students match words with definitions.

A

Grammar
Students (individually) infer a rule from examples.

C

Listening
Students complete a table while listening.

A/C

Speaking
Students ask and answer scripted questions in pairs.

A

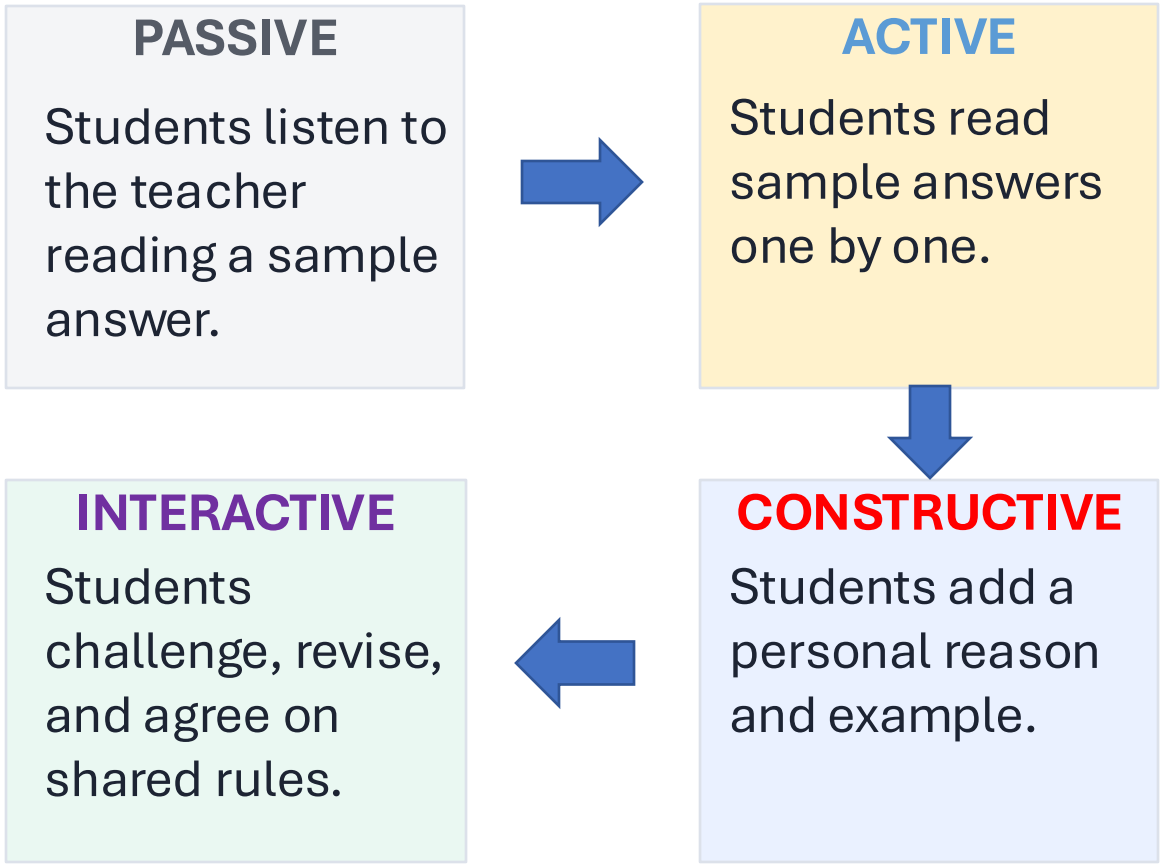
Writing
Pairs draft one shared email and revise it together.

I

Tip: classify the learner behaviour, not the activity label.

Ambiguous task: same instruction, different enactment

"Discuss with your partner: Should phones be allowed in class?"



Question: What has changed — the instruction, or the learner behaviour?

Common classification traps

Visible participation can mislead us.

Talking = Interactive?
Not if learners simply take turns answering questions.

Group work = deep engagement?
Not if one learner does the thinking for everyone.

Busy hands = deep thinking?
Taking verbatim notes stays at Active level only.

Intended task = actual mode?
Learners may enact the same task at a lower or higher level.

Key takeaway: Look at both what learners do and what they produce, not the task format alone.

Collaborative task redesign sprint

Each group receives a different ELT question card.

Your mission
Identify the current mode and build the full ICAP ladder.

Your evidence
Point to what learners do, what they produce, and how they interact.

Your product
Four versions of the same task to present to other groups.



Climb the ICAP ladder — step by step

Do not just add group work. Change what learners must do and pay attention to their products.

P

Passive
Receives information (no observable response)

Verbs: listen, read, watch, observe

→

A

Active
Manipulate what is given (observable behaviour)

Verbs: match, choose, highlight

→

C

Constructive
Generate something new (proof of inferences/prior knowledge)

Verbs: explain, infer, adapt, create

→

I

Interactive
Co-construct an outcome (reciprocal interactions)

Verbs: respond, negotiate, revise together

(*)Note: Example verbs are context-dependent, look at what they produce as well

Question cards

Different ELT contexts, one shared ICAP lens.

Vocabulary
Students copy ten new words and their meanings on the board.

Grammar
Students complete ten multiple-choice gap-fill questions.

Reading
Students silently read a short article.

Speaking
Students take turns practising a scripted restaurant dialogue in pairs.

For each card: classify → redesign → prepare a concise final version.

ICAP task-analysis checklist

Use this checklist to guide redesign and peer review.

1. The current ICAP mode is identified correctly and reasonably justified.
2. All redesigned versions match their intended ICAP modes.
3. The same learning objective is maintained across the full ladder.
4. Instructions specify a clear, observable learner product.
5. The activities are feasible in an ELT classroom.

Sprint time: redesign your task

Work in groups. Build your ICAP versions, then pitch your redesign.

Decide

What is the current ICAP mode? What learner behaviours show this?

Redesign

How can the task move toward different modes by changing what learners do, what they produce, and how they interact?

Prepare

Design the final tasks in a way that convinces the other groups to rank yours highest:

- What learners do
- Expected output
- Evidence confirming the inteded mode

You have 10 minutes.

Peer review and scoring

Review other groups' redesigned tasks using a scorecard.

Group No. (……)	
Criterion	**✓ / point**
The current ICAP mode is identified correctly and justified	☐
All redesigned versions match their intended ICAP modes.	☐
The same learning objective is maintained across the full ladder.	☐
Instructions specify a clear, observable learner product.	☐
The activities are feasible in an ELT classroom.	☐
Final score	____ /5

(*) Presenter will check ICAP alignment before announcing the winning group.

Tie-breaker: creativity that supports the learning goal.

Design principles to take away

Five practical reminders for ELT task design.

1	**Look beyond participation**	Judge engagement by what learners actually do.
2	**Make cognitive demand explicit**	Specify what learners must do and/or produce.
3	**Make interaction consequential**	When interaction is intended, learners should build on one another's contributions.
4	**Guard against enactment drift**	Check learner behaviour & output to prevent drift from the intended ICAP mode.
5	**Stay purposeful and feasible**	Cognitive engagement must FIT the learning objective and the classroom context (Higher modes are note always better and necessary)

Reflection and Q&A

Connect the workshop to your own classroom.

Reflection prompt 1
One task I now want to reconsider is…

Reflection prompt 2
One realistic adaptation I could try next week is…

Questions? Constraints? Adaptations?

Thank you!

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