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# Introduction

## **Quote 1.1 Dewey on educative, uneducative and miseducative tasks**

If one means by a 'task' simply an undertaking involving difficulties that have to be overcome, then children, youth, and adults alike require tasks in order that there may be continued development. But if one means by a task something that has no interest, makes no appeal, that is wholly alien and hence uncongenial, the matter is quite different. Tasks in the former sense are educative because they supply an indispensable stimulus to thinking, to reflective inquiry. Tasks in the latter sense signify nothing but sheer strain, constraint, and the need of some external motivation for keeping at them. They are *uneducative* because they fail to introduce a clearer consciousness of ends and a search for proper means of realization. They are *miseducative*, because they deaden and stupefy; they lead to that confused and dulled state of mind that always attends an action carried on without a realizing sense of what it is all about. They are also miseducative because they lead to dependence upon external ends; the child works simply because of the pressure of the taskmaster, and diverts his energies just in the degree in which this pressure is relaxed; or he works because of some alien inducement – to get some reward that has no intrinsic connection with what he is doing.

(1913/1975: 54–6)

This book explores the 'educative', 'uneducative' and 'miseducative' properties of tasks in second language education. As part of the raw material that second language teachers, learners and researchers work with in different ways, tasks have been an element in second language teaching and research for over 30 years, and yet their use continues to invite controversy and debate. One of the aims of this book is to explore why this should be so, and to consider what people do to make tasks educative or uneducative, why this can happen and what the alternatives might be.

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