

## 【研究ノート】

# An Exploration of the Syllabus Design Landscape: From the Perspective of a Language Teacher

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## Abstract

An exploration of the syllabus design landscape can take you through a variety of approaches and methodologies. A good syllabus acts as a guide for good teaching and learning and there is a lot to digest and material to disseminate when approaching syllabus design. This paper aims to provide the reader with a basic introduction to the principles and processes involved in syllabus design from the perspective of a language teacher.

## 1. Introduction

The syllabus plays an important role in the life of every teacher. It provides students with a glimpse into the course you have created and it can be viewed as a contract between the teacher and the student. The syllabus outlines the responsibilities and expectations of both the teacher and the student. It is a road map as to what will be taught and in turn the student gets an understanding of what they need to do in order to pass or get credit for the course. A good syllabus therefore, provides information that serves a very important purpose, primarily that of providing a blueprint, a framework as ‘a teaching device to facilitate learning’ (Widdowson, 1984:26). Furthermore, a syllabus allows the teacher to think systematically and coherently about what they teach and how they teach. With respect to second language acquisition (SLA), it also encourages us to be aware of the learning principles involved in language learning and the strategies learners’ use when learning. A good syllabus should be supported by appropriate theories of SLA, have a concrete understanding of the needs of the learners, provide goals and learning outcomes, and be practical and easy to follow for both inexperienced and veteran

teachers.

This paper aims to provide the reader with a basic introduction to the principles and processes involved in syllabus design from the perspective of a language teacher.

## 2. The Concept of the ‘Syllabus’

‘Curriculum’ and ‘Syllabus’ are terms all teachers are aware of. One could suggest however, that these terms have been used imprecisely and interpretation of these labels may vary from teacher to teacher. In the UK, the term ‘syllabus’ is referred to as the ‘curriculum’ in the USA (Hall, 2001; White, 1988) and within the ELT literature there is some confusion as to what these terms define (Nunan, 1988a).

The word ‘syllabus’ is a Greek term and ‘curriculum’ is of Latin origins. The difference between these terms however, goes beyond etymology. The ‘curriculum’ can best be described as the grand design or plan and may include statements of intentions or goals in terms of what the teacher must teach. It is generally devised at the highest advisory level. It can describe the whole content that is taught on a particular course or

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program and may be defined as a set of institutional goals, and a combination of instructional practice (Stern, 1983).

Hall (2001) points out that teachers are rarely ‘free agents’ when it comes to the curriculum decision making process and the creation of the curriculum is hardly neutral (Graves, 2008), as it reflects the beliefs, values and theories of those who produce it (Nunan, 1988a). If the curriculum can be described as ‘macro’ then the syllabus would be its ‘micro’ relation. The syllabus should sit comfortably within the curriculum and serve its aims. Unlike a curriculum, which is a wide description of the overall content being taught, as in English courses at Tohoku University, the syllabus is an outline of a specific subject that is narrower and more specific. One way to think of it would be that a curriculum establishes goals and objectives and is prescriptive. The syllabus concerns how these goals and objectives are delivered and in what shape or form. If the curriculum prescribes the objectives of a particular course, the syllabus provides the means to achieve them. Nunan (1988a) summarizes these differences when he suggests that the “curriculum is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education programmes. Syllabus, on the other hand, focuses more narrowly on the selection of grading content” (p.8).

### 3. Steps in Course Design

Hall (2011) points out that “syllabus design can be a complex process based around, for example, an initial analysis of learners’ needs and the context for learning, and, later, an evaluation of the syllabus’ s effectiveness” (p.200).

A glance through the ELT literature provides us with various models on syllabus design and course development (Dubin & Olshtain 1986; Hedge, 2000; Mihal & Purmensity 2016; Nunan 1988a;

Taba 1962; White 1988). Mihal & Purmensity (2016) suggest that these models or processes in which a course is created all follow a similar pattern. Initially, course creators have to take into account learners’ aims for studying English; identifying the needs of the students represents the first step of this process. This in turn, is followed by a reflection on what the goals and objectives within the curriculum should entail. Next, language curriculum designers then have to make decisions on the content or type of syllabus to be taught as well as the sequence of the language content to be covered in the courses. The next stage involves the creation of instructional activities, materials, and lesson plans for teachers to use in their classes which adhere to course and syllabus objectives. The final stage is assessment, where assessment instruments for goals and objectives are designed and implemented.

In combining the models and suggestions for course design within the literature a five-stage plan of course design and syllabus development as listed below will be discussed.

- Stage 1. Needs analysis
- Stage 2. Formulation of objectives
- Stage 3. Selection of content and syllabus design
- Stage 4. Selection of learning activities / lesson materials
- Stage 5. Assessment

Although not an exhaustive list, each step is examined in the sections below with a description of the processes involved within each stage of course and syllabus development.

#### 3.1 Stage 1: Needs Analysis

A ‘needs analysis’ refers to a process that helps language teachers give the students ‘the language they need.’ Needs analysis is defined by Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group

of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (p.189). Johnson (2008) states that “in order to plan foreign language teaching we need to find a way of analyzing learners’ needs. What is going to tell us just how much, and for what purposes our learners will need which foreign languages, it is the process of needs analysis” (p.200).

Hutchinson & Walters (1987) state that a ‘needs analysis’ can be executed through the implementation of questionnaires, interviews, observations, data collection and informal consultations with sponsors, learners and teachers. They describe the ‘need analysis’ as the most characteristic feature of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course design. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) describe the needs analysis as an examination of the tasks and activities learners will use English for, the knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situations, the learners’ wants, their previous learning experiences, as well as an identification of the learners’ current skills and language use.

There is some doubt however as to whether or not a ‘needs analysis’ is really necessary. The ‘Needs analysis’ was originally developed and emphasized in ESP courses and some scholars have highlighted the argument that it is not possible to specify the needs of general English learners through such analysis as these ‘needs’ are too wide ranging (Seedhouse, 1995). A private language school offering business courses for Japanese office workers may need to carry out a needs analysis to discover what the goals and wishes their customers have in relation to their desired business English proficiency. In contrast 1st year Japanese university students who are not English majors but instead major in humanities and STEM subjects may have a wide-ranging view on what they want to study with some having no such preferences. It therefore begs the

question, as language educators, if the students at this stage know what they want to learn and that this question is best answered by the curriculum designers and the teachers who teach them.

It could be argued that If you are already familiar with your learners L2 ability, through internal or external testing, and are aware of the goals they need to be successful in order to achieve their objectives through end of course questionnaires and other forms of data collection, then a needs analysis may become unnecessary. The more teachers and their colleagues understand the circumstances surrounding a particular course, the more likely it is that teachers might be able to work with a more implicit type of ‘needs analysis’. If teachers decide to undertake a needs analysis in such situations it may only be as part of a general review and evaluation of the course as a whole and how, if applicable, the course can be adapted to fit a particular group of students needs as in postgraduate students who may have to write papers in English.

However, if you are starting from scratch, have a high staff turnover and you are unaware of the students you will teach or the goals they need to be successful within their field, whether it be general English or ESP, than a needs analysis becomes much more important.

Richards (1990) points out that a “needs analysis is also fundamental to the planning of general English courses” (p.2). The trend in modern language teaching is towards being learner-centered and although student needs are fundamental to these current learner-centered approaches, a needs analysis it seems, is rarely carried out in the General English classroom or English for general purposes (Brindley, 1984; Ferris, 1998). There are ample studies, however, on how a needs analysis is beneficial for specific courses such as English for Academic Purposes, English for Business Purposes, and English for Specific Purposes courses (Bosher &

Smalkoski, 2002; Cowling, 2007; Jasso-Aguilar, 2005).

It is not within the scope of this paper to fully discuss the merits and significance of a ‘needs analysis’ but it is considered in some circles to be one of the building blocks in syllabus planning, as it is reflected upon when designing a language syllabus, regardless if it is ESP or a general English language learning programme.

### 3.2 Stage 2: Formulation of Objectives

This stage can include the purpose and objectives of the course in light of student considerations and educational goals. Dubin & Olshtain, (1986) suggest that in a similar vein to a needs analysis that a preparatory step in course design is a necessary prerequisite to the planning and designing of a syllabus. Within this step, the gathering of information that sheds light on the course design process is the objective here. This may entail an examination of classroom methodology, discussions and meetings with faculty members, and a review and reflection of resources and facilities that are available. Hedge (2000) suggests that within this stage a consideration of the learners as individuals is required. This consideration may entail issues such as the need to relate class topics or themes to the interests of students, a CLIL course for engineering students would be an example of this. She continues that a consideration of learners as members of a class group is also desired as it may help in deciding class level, the appropriateness of a certain methodology or classroom delivery with respect to class size. Hedge (2000) also points out that there should be some reflection on the educational system that is producing this course or curriculum. This can mean how the course objectives align with the grading or assessment system in place. Do the course objectives help increase TOEFL scores if an educational institution uses this test as a measurement of student progress?

The formulation of course objectives is the process of creating an outline of course goals that are descriptions of what a learner is expected to be able to do upon the completion of a course and may include expressions such as ‘Students will be able to... / will acquire the ability to.../ and develop (particular) skills. Course goals can be considered learning outcomes, whilst course objectives may be part of a bigger picture and be connected to wider educational goals such as the improvement in TOEFL scores or the learning process such as developing independent learning strategies.

### 3.3 Stage 3: Selection of Content and Syllabus Design

The focus within this stage is on how the content of the syllabus reflects the goals and objectives that have been drawn up in the previous stage and also to determine what type of syllabus you wish to create that best suits the needs of the students and the overall curriculum.

Hall (2011) points out that “perhaps the most common way of thinking about and describing syllabuses is in terms of their ‘content,’ that is, the nature of the units into which the syllabus is divided, for example, structures; functions and notions; situations; genre and text-type; processes, procedures and tasks; or language skills” (p.201). This can lead us on to a discussion on the types of syllabuses there are and the distinction between ‘product-oriented’ and ‘process-oriented syllabuses’.

#### 3.3.1. Product-Oriented Syllabus:

The product-oriented syllabus focuses on what the learners will study and acquire by the end of a course and assumes a synthetic approach that adheres to a step-by-step procedure of teaching a list of particular items. The grammatical, situational and notional-functional are the examples of the product-oriented syllabus.

***Grammatical / structural:***

The purpose within this type of syllabus is to teach grammatical structures such as the ‘past progressive tense.’ There is a focus on grammar rules and the memorization of structures in a step-by-step process that is determined by level of difficulty. This kind of syllabus has faced a lot of criticism and has been accused of following a ‘learn your grammar’ then ‘find out what its for’ pattern. In a communicative context this may be nonsensical, as ‘form’ cannot be learned in isolation to ‘meaning’. Language does not exist outside the context of communication, except in the idealized world of theoretical linguistics that bares no relation or concern with actual language teaching.

***Situational:***

The limitations of the grammatical syllabus led to the focus on the situational rather than the grammatical. The emphasis here is to teach situations that the students might encounter outside of the classroom. A syllabus of this kind might contain situations or topics such as ‘At the post office’, ‘At the train station’ or ‘At a party.’ It is learner centered as opposed to subject centered (Wilkins, 1976). Here, the emphasis is on the learner, who it is expected will actively participate in different situations where the L2 is being spoken. A criticism however, is the fact that it is limited only to the needs of a selected few students who are likely to encounter these situations in their L2 experiences.

***Notional-Functional:***

A notional-functional syllabus was created in response to previous syllabuses that were seen as lacking a focus on what is communicated. Wilkins states that the notional-functional syllabus reflects his view that “the content of language teaching is a collection of the functions or the notions that are

performed when the language is used” (p.8).

The syllabus content is organized into a series of functions and notions. A ‘function’ can be described as a specific purpose in a given context. For instance, the notion of shopping requires numerous language functions, such as bargaining, trying on a garment or asking about the features of a product.

White (1988) claims that there is considerable difficulty in grading such functions and how to determine whether apologizing is a harder function of language than expressing approval. Nunan (1988a) states that “initially, it seemed that functional-notional principles would result in syllabuses which were radically different from those based on grammatical principles. However, in practice, the new syllabuses were rather similar to those they were intended to replace. In both syllabuses, the focus tended to be on the end products or results of the teaching / learning process” (p.40). In addition, Widdowson (1979) pointed out that inventories of functions and notions do not necessarily reflect the way languages are learned any more than do inventories of grammatical points and lexical items. He also claims that dividing language into discrete units of whatever type misrepresents the nature of language as communication.

**3.3.2. Process-Oriented Syllabus:**

A process-oriented syllabus focuses on the pedagogical processes leading to language outcomes. These approaches assume that learning can be done experientially. The task-based, skill-based and content-based types of syllabus are examples of this.

***Task-Based Syllabus:***

This syllabus is designed with the intention of getting the learners to perform a series of purposeful tasks. Here the focus shifts from the linguistic content to the pedagogical with an

emphasis on learning. Activities within this syllabus require the student to carry out exercises using the target language (Nunan, 1988b). Language teaching arises during the performance of a given task. Criticisms of the approach tend to suggest that this kind of syllabus emphasizes tasks over language learning.

#### *Skill-Based Syllabus:*

The purpose of this syllabus is to teach some specific skills that are considered necessary or useful in using a language. It focuses on the four skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading and can include skills such as reading / listening for the gist or main idea and paragraph writing. Such a syllabus would incorporate a series of language skills that the students' need to learn in addition to a list of topics, grammatical forms and vocabulary in relation to these skills.

#### *Content-Based Syllabus:*

This syllabus is used to teach content in the foreign language. Such as syllabus would be seen in immersion schools or in 'CLIL' classes where subjects such as Biology and Maths are taught. In such cases, although the subject matter is of primary and vital importance, language learning occurs concurrently with content learning.

#### *Deciding the syllabus type and language teaching methodology*

There are a potential 6 types of syllabuses to choose from which begs the question, which is the most suitable choice for your own particular institution or schools need? This can depend on a number of factors such as teacher experience and training. In the Japanese context NNEST (Non-native English speaking teachers) traditionally teach the passive skills such as grammar and reading whilst the NEST's (Native English speaking Teachers)

teach the 'communicative' classes. (See Kavanagh 2016 for a discussion of NEST's and NNEST's). Teachers', regardless if they are a NEST or NNEST, need to be proficient in the language they are teaching and teacher training may become key if this proficiency is lacking. A teacher's resume and experience may therefore push us towards one kind of syllabus over another. What is important here is that the teacher is aware of the syllabus type and what kind of teaching is involved. Teacher seminars, faculty development workshops are some of the ways to deliver this 'training' or guidance. Class sizes may also dictate what syllabus your institution has a preference for. In a grammatical or structural syllabus, where drills are ever-present, it may prove to be difficult in a large class of 100 students. What kind of examination, internal or external, that your institution wishes to carry out may also influence syllabus type. A typical example of this in Japan would be teaching for entrance examination tests which have a huge influence on what is taught at high schools and therefore can dictate what is taught in the classroom and may encourage a 'if it is not in the test there is no need to learn it' mentality.

Hall (2011) suggests that the most common type of syllabus is the 'multidimensional or multi-layered syllabus' which draws upon all types of syllabuses in a hybrid approach. Typically, Hall (2011) claims, these syllabuses combine structures, functions and notions and elements of task-based learning and skills development. These syllabuses may favor one type as the main focus but incorporate the elements of other syllabus types when required or the syllabus creators deem it necessary.

If a syllabus is a series of checklists that among other things deal with communicative functions, discourse skills, and study skills, a question that may be asked is, how will we teach it? What teaching methodology do we employ and is the focus teacher or learner centered?



The syllabus and its relationship with teaching methodology is still open to debate. Nunan (1988a) outlines two basic views concerning the debate on syllabus design and teaching methodology. They are under his umbrella terms of ‘the narrow view’ and ‘the broad view’. The former views syllabus design as being concerned predominately with the grading of content and that methodology covers the selection of learning tasks and activities. This view draws a line between syllabus design and methodology and views them as separate entities.

The broad view however, discounts this distinction between the syllabus and methodology mainly as a result of the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement. Nunan states that “with the distinction of procedural, task-based, content-based, and other non-linguistic approaches to syllabus design, the distinction between syllabus design and methodology becomes blurred” (p.60).

This would suggest that a specific syllabus type lends itself more readily to a particular methodology whereas the narrow view suggests that the syllabus is a fixed set of items to follow, but that the methodology is flexible and the domain of the teacher. Stern (1987) supports this notion that syllabus design should be left to linguists or language specialists and the methodology left to the decision of the teacher. However, by adopting the ‘broad view’, if a syllabus presents a series of grammatical forms by presenting language items synthetically this would probably result in a structural or grammatical syllabus and consequently to grammar translation and audiolingual language teaching methods (Hall, 2011).

### 3.4 Stage 4: Selection of Learning Activities / Lesson Materials

Assuming that a syllabus type has been decided the fourth stage on course and syllabus design is an examination and creation of the learning

activities and lesson materials.

#### 3.4.1 Learning Activities

Let us assume here that a notional-functional syllabus has been created and the preferred teaching ideology is a ‘communicative approach’ as in CLT. Kavanagh (2012) suggests that CLT is best considered as a reflection of a communicative perspective on language that can be used to support an unlimited amount of classroom procedures. Classroom activities typically focuses the student on completing tasks, solving problems and assisting learners to communicate meaningfully in the target language. Examples of learning activities can include role-playing, group and pair work, information gaps, discussion and opinion sharing, and scavenger hunts. In a notional-functional syllabus there may be a series of ‘functions’ such as expressing agreement and apologizing. In this syllabus the students learn how to use these functions or target language to express their own ideas and aims to promote language learning using this target language.

In CLT there is an emphasis on communication rather than the accurate use of structure or form. (Grammar is not completely abandoned of course). Fluency is given priority over accuracy as errors are seen as part of the learning process, the teachers’ therefore find themselves in the role of facilitator and provide feedback at the end of an assigned activity. The grammatical structure based syllabus will have therefore been abandoned in favor of a more functional or notional based syllabus.

#### 3.4.2. Lesson Materials

Most classes, books and teaching ideologies claim to be communicative in some way. If a textbook is chosen, this would dictate the content of the syllabus. For example, a course may cover units in a textbook on a weekly basis. This may lead to a rigid syllabus giving little freedom to the teacher.

Alternatively, the institution the teacher works at may create their own ‘in house’ lesson materials and books for the teachers to follow and this may include an internal final examination that all classes within this syllabus take.

Some syllabuses however, do not require the use of a textbook and leave this decision up to the teacher. This however, could result in differing textbooks used by different teachers for the same course and therefore create differences in class content regardless of the fact that the syllabuses are identical. If the syllabus encourages the use of created materials this can lead the teacher to deciding on whether to use ‘authentic materials’ (materials that were not originally intended for language lessons as in TED talks) or creating their own materials or doing a hybrid of both. This, of course, may depend on the level and age of the students being taught, ‘Authentic materials’ may be edited and simplified and created materials can tackle specifically the needs of particular learners.

A summary of lesson materials and activities can be seen in most academic textbooks used in MA courses and as part of teaching training programs and discussion. The trading of ideas within a school or university is often encouraged and carried out when executing this stage of syllabus implementation.

### 3.5 Stage 5: Assessment

‘Assessment’ refers to a variety of ways to monitor and keep track of students’ progress whereas testing is a form of assessment that is mostly just one kind of test or examination, usually administered at the end of the course. Some syllabuses have a combination of both whilst some syllabuses have a preference over one or the other. Some are left unspecified. Both assessment and testing are evaluations of student performance and can form the basis of the student’s final grade. Hedge (2000) points out that “whilst tests can be used as a

‘bolt on’ procedure at end-points in a learning programme, assessment is integral to the whole process of teaching and learning. It is the means by which students’ language learning development and achievements are monitored over time” (p.376). Assessment she continues can be broken down into two parts ‘formative and’ summative’ assessment. ‘Formative’ assessment is a way of keeping track of a students progress and helping them along the way to course completion. It may entail, listening and vocabulary quizzes / assessment and written reports or essays as in the successful completion of a 5-paragraph paper. ‘Summative assessment’ is a means to measure learner achievement. Significant differences between the two include the fact that formative assessment is prepared and carried out by the class teacher as a routine aspect of the teaching and learning process and the results of such assessment can not only be used to evaluate students, but also to help the teacher focus on the student’s strengths, weaknesses and needs. In contrast, summative assessment is not always carried out and prepared by the class teacher and there may not be a direct connection between class content and the test. Summative assessment may also be externally imposed as in a TOEIC, TOEFL or EIKEN test and not explicitly part of the syllabus, and may be taken as part of the overall evaluation when assigning student grades.

What will students be asked to do? How is the course grade determined, and what is the grading scale? These are considerations determined by the syllabus type chosen and whether it is a product or process-orientated syllabus.

The general trend in language teaching since the 1970s moved away from a grammatical or linguistically oriented syllabus (product orientated) towards a more communicative approach (process-orientated). This kind of syllabus places emphasis on the importance of “the process through which



outcomes are to be brought about” —thus being “process-orientated” (Nunan, 1988a, p. 14).

“Product-orientated” syllabuses suggests Nunan (1988a) are those in which “the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction” (p.14).

To give an example of this in relation to the assessment of writing, a product-orientated syllabus evaluation may focus on the grammar and sentence construction for short essays and this may be reflected in actual compositions and grammatical testing such as in ‘gap fill’ or multiple-choice questions where the appropriate grammatical tenses must be chosen. A process-orientated syllabus would alternatively focus on how ideas are organized in writing and generally emphasize the processes writers’ use in the completion of essays and reports. A skills based syllabus would be an example of this. Within such a syllabus some of the skills taught with regards to writing would be the process of learning about how to write thesis statements, topic and supporting sentences and paragraph writing. These skills can then be assessed within the classroom, and are also skills that can be used as transferable skills out of the classroom, or in other classes and are also evident in external examinations such as the TOEFL test.

As mentioned earlier a syllabus may lean towards being one type or another but there is a tendency for syllabuses today to be multi-dimensional or multi-layered and therefore when assessing students, elements of both product and process-based approaches might be advantageous as Welt (1990) points out. “There is as yet no theoretically pure syllabus, as both product and process syllabuses can be criticized on theoretical as well as practical grounds. A theory- driven syllabus, however, remains an essential requirement, as language teaching cannot take place without a conceptual framework which gives effective direction to the enterprise. The

product-process distinction is therefore best regarded as a continuum on which any syllabus can be placed, as it is likely to contain both product and process elements in practice” (p.77).

An approach based on eclecticism is commonplace within ELT with many textbooks combining various approaches within their syllabuses and Hutchinson & Walters (1987) claim that “any teaching material must, in reality, operate several syllabuses at the same time. One of them will probably be used as the principle organizing feature, but the others are still there” (p.89).

#### 4. Uniformity and the Degree of Teacher Autonomy

When creating a course syllabus there may be varying degrees of teacher freedom in terms of choice in relation to the syllabus and its content. Hedges (2000) suggests that following a prescribed syllabus in a set textbook would be an example of minimal freedom for the language teacher. Another example she gives is of using a textbook syllabus but with the freedom to select material from it and adjust timings to fit students needs. As an example of teacher autonomy, Hedge (2000) gives the example of teachers who can formulate a plan based on student needs by selecting and designing materials to teach it. Another example she states would be a teacher who can establish the goals of a class based on negotiations with the students and making decisions with them about the course and the materials used. A teacher having less autonomy in comparison to some level of freedom has both advantages and disadvantages depending on the teacher involved. Inexperienced part time university English teachers in Japan may prefer a ‘rigid’ syllabus which clearly prescribes everything that has to be done and how. This also has the added benefit of less classroom preparation as the materials (as in a textbook) and the lesson plans themselves are laid

out for the teacher with a set of given instructions. More experienced teachers however, may prefer both freedom and responsibility and therefore a syllabus which is more flexible. This may entail the teacher creating their own materials based on the curriculum objectives and syllabus goals. A more ‘rigid’ syllabus would perhaps guarantee a uniformed syllabus where all teachers are doing the same thing, albeit with their own personal teaching style and approach. A syllabus that allows more freedom could theoretically also create uniformity in terms of content if the goals and skills that the syllabus outlines are adhered to by all of the teachers or if a common examination or series of tests were given throughout the course or at the end of the semester, which was compulsory for all classes. These decisions however are usually not made by teachers, and how much freedom you have may depend on the institution you teach at.

## 5. The English Curriculum and Syllabus Development at Tohoku University

At Tohoku University we are currently working on curriculum reform with regards to the English language education we provide. The aim here is to provide a unified curriculum with set goals and objectives for our classes. Based on these goals and objectives we have tried to provide a set of skills to be covered within the classes that are outlined in their syllabuses. We have created a skills-based type syllabus that outlines the core skills that the students will need to learn. Although predominantly taking a skills-based focus, the syllabuses we have created are multidimensional and also borrow from other syllabus types. These new syllabuses will take effect from April 2020.

In the creation of these syllabuses for next April an informal ‘needs analysis’ was carried out by speaking to various departments at the university about what they want their students to learn and the

English skills they need as they progress through their university career. In addition, we endeavored to examine what the students already know in terms of their English learning background in addition to their ability. Knowing what our students have learned and how it was learned at high school can provide a lot of information on how we can move forward with course design and implementation. At high school students have learned the grammar and structure of the language but struggle to produce it fluently or spontaneously.

English for Academic purposes (EGAP) is the direction the university is heading and this is reflected in the kind of programs it wants and is the nucleus of the English curriculum / syllabus reform. EGAP can be interpreted as being similar to Cummins’ (1984) CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) but within an EFL context. According to Cummins’ theory, he defines Basic Interpersonal Communication skills (BICS) as the language used for interacting socially and conversationally, and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the language needed to engage with cognitively challenging tasks in an academic setting. Cummins’ theory on language proficiency was intended for the understanding and assessing of the language development of minority language children in L2 or ESL situations. But it can be also used as a general framework for EFL and the goals we are trying to achieve in an EFL context. The tables below give a basic illustration of what is meant by BICS and CALP.

Table 1 Example of BICS

<p>They occur in social interactions that are usually context embedded. They are not very demanding cognitively. Examples: Expressing basic likes / dislikes / asking for directions etc. In the Japan context this is done up to Junior high school (Yoshida, 2009).</p>
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Table 2 Example of CALP

The ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate, summarize, compare, classify, scan, skim, note take, evaluate, and infer.  
They are cognitively demanding.  
In the Japan context there is a bigger emphasis on CALP from high school level (Yoshida, 2009).

These CALP principles are transferable to the skills required to be successful in the TOFEL test. A test our students do at Tohoku University. The skills needed to answer questions successfully: infer, gain the gist of, evaluate meaning, expressing and connecting ideas, and note taking lie at the core of CALP.

Most readers are probably aware of Bloom's taxonomy (1955) of HOTS and LOTS and the revised version by Anderson & Krathwol (2001). TOEFL contains a balance of LOTS (Lower order thinking skills which are similar to BICS) and HOTS (Higher order thinking skills which are similar to CALP). TOEFL is also heavily biased towards and influenced by CALP; IELTS is more orientated towards BICS (Ellis et al., 2009).

CALP is also used as a framework in a lot of syllabi at university level. It is included as a part of a MEXT directive where teachers of all subjects at all levels of education train their students to use language for cognitively demanding purposes (CALP) (Yoshida, 2009). I employ a CLIL approach within my own classes (See Kavanagh, (2018) for an overview of CLIL). CLIL is defined as an approach to develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). These skills have evolved through the 4C-framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture), which involves different techniques for improving corresponding competences. An example would be the cognitive discourse functions as outlined by Dalton- Puffer (2013) which include classifying, defining, describing,

evaluating, explaining, exploring and reporting. This above construct is also theoretically founded in educational curriculum theory (Dalton- Puffer, 2013). I would suggest that we need to challenge our students to make the transition from BICS to CALP and the CLIL methodology can provide us with the tools to do this.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to highlight syllabus design as a very complex process from the needs analysis that helps with the formulation of objectives which in turn help decide the selection of content and syllabus type. This leads to syllabus designers choosing the learning activities / lesson materials and measures of assessment that best serve this syllabus type. A conclusion that some may arrive at is that there is no "best" method of teaching a language, nor is there a best type of syllabus. Nunan (1988a) suggests that "there is not a great deal of agreement within the teaching profession on the nature of language and language learning. As a consequence, we must make judgments in selecting syllabus components from all the options which are available to us. The need to make value judgments and choices in deciding what to include in (or omit from) specifications of content and which elements are to be the basic building blocks of the syllabus, presents syllabus designers with constant problems." (P.10).

An exploration of the syllabus design landscape can take you through a variety of approaches and methodologies A good syllabus acts as a guide for good teaching and learning and there is a lot to digest and material to disseminate when approaching syllabus design as this paper has tried to illustrate.

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