
Poster Presentation

Innovations in EAP: Material Design

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This paper outlines the design, development, and implementation of a first-year academic English course at a Japanese university with a focus on designing materials that encourage active learning through project-based learning (PBL). The authors explicate the process of course design and material creation designed to incorporate academic genres into communicative tasks. This paper should be of interest to educators who are involved in curriculum design, course design, and material creation

The fundamental goal of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is to cultivate in students the communicative skills they need to study in an English language environment (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). It is important, then, that educators incorporate communicative activities into the EAP classroom (BALEAP, 2008; Karimkhanlui, 2007), yet many teachers find it difficult to do so. This paper outlines the design and development of a series of communicative academic English courses at a Japanese university, using Nation and Macalister's (2010) model of the curriculum design process. This framework depicts eight essential components of the course design process: (a) considering the environment, (b) discovering needs, (c) following principles, (d) goals, (e) content and sequencing, (f) finding a format and presenting material, (g) monitoring and assessing students, and (h) evaluating a course. Each step of the process is explicated below.

Environment

In 2016 a decision was made to create a new curriculum for the Department of British and American Studies ("Eibeï") at Nanzan University. This decision stemmed from the university's move to a quarter system from April 2017. It was decided that first-year students would study one Academic English A (AEA)

course per quarter, with each course comprising fifteen 90-minute classes (two classes per week for 7.5 weeks). Three teachers would each be responsible for teaching two sections of the course, for a total of six sections, with 22-25 students per section. The four AEA courses (AEA I, II, III, and IV) would follow a content-based framework, with content areas chosen according to Eibei faculty members' areas of expertise (Table 1). This content exposure would also be combined with the teaching of practical skills to help prepare students for future academic studies in English.

Needs

Over the course of their studies at Nanzan University, students in Eibei are expected to participate in overseas study programs, take content courses in English, and write their graduation theses in English. To prepare students for these learning situations, the AEA course is needed to develop their critical thinking abilities and autonomy and to equip them with presentation skills, information literacy, language competency, and communication skills. As the first-year students were new to university study, it was also important to consider their lack of familiarity with the university environment and to help them transition from their various high school English class styles to the student-centered environment of the course. In addition, the course designers wanted to facilitate the development of strong peer group bonds and create a supportive learning environment. It was hoped that a comfortable class environment would encourage students to be bold in speaking out and sharing ideas and would help them grow in confidence as English users.

Table 1
Course Design Framework for Academic English

Course	Quarter	Content 1 (classes 1-7)	Content 2 (classes 8-15)
AEA I	1	Language	Communication
AEA II	2	Culture	Education
AEA III	3	Literature	Sociology
AEA IV	4	History	Politics

Principles

The course designers agreed that the new course must be constructed on a solid pedagogical foundation. Project-based learning (PBL) has been documented as an effective way to: (a) help students acquire academic skills and broaden their academic vocabulary (Beckett & Slater, 2005), (b) enhance students' problem-solving abilities and motivation (Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012), (c) improve students' interpersonal and cognitive skills (Kettanun, 2015), and (d) help students develop a sense of trust and cooperation within their group (Fushino, 2011). A PBL approach, then, seemed a natural choice in designing the AEA course.

According to Hedge (1993), a project is "an extended task which usually integrates language skills work through a number of activities" (p. 276). Students have different learning styles (Hadfield, 2014), so it was important that the projects in the AEA course include a diverse array of tasks. The projects also needed to allow the students to think critically, expand their digital literacies, and develop their communication and presentation skills. Added to that, given that most AEA students would study abroad at some point during their academic careers, it was important for the course to include activities to develop their intercultural communication skills.

Goals

Taking into account the needs of the first-year students outlined earlier, the course design team came up with specific learning goals for each quarter of the course. As an example, the course objectives for the second quarter are included here:

Students will

- listen to and comprehend the main points of a formal talk;
- use reading strategies to read and identify key information in English texts;
- further their understanding of and ability to think critically about issues related to culture and education;
- express their ideas clearly and participate actively in a discussion in English;
- develop their presentation skills and deliver effective presentations in

English; and

- develop academic writing skills and write a short research report in English.

Content and Sequencing

The instructors began by considering core projects that would serve as the primary learning and assessment tools for the course. Each project would expose students to genuine academic genres such as poster presentations and research reports. The course designers decided on a poster presentation and a ‘PechaKucha’ presentation as the two main projects for the first quarter. (A PechaKucha presentation involves presenting using PowerPoint slides which automatically change every 20 seconds – see Cripps, 2014). These were to be on topics related to content covered in class. In the second quarter, each student would work in a small group to produce a 3-4 minute video introducing an aspect of Japanese culture for the first project. The second project would involve a 1,200-word group research paper addressing an issue related to education and formatted in American Psychological Association (APA) style. For each of the four main projects, the students would be required to complete both written and spoken tasks. For example, for the poster presentation, students worked in pairs to prepare and deliver a poster presentation and later submitted individual written summaries of presentations they watched.

Format & Materials

Putting together comprehensive student textbooks was the most practical way to give the AEA courses structure. Compiling complete textbooks ensured some degree of continuity across the different sections and among instructors implementing the syllabus. Having all the materials ahead of time enabled students to prepare before class and have easy access to past lesson material. It also freed instructors from ongoing copying and lesson planning throughout the busy academic quarters. With only one week between the end of AEA I and the start of AEA II, the authors decided to prepare and print materials for the first two quarters together as one textbook. Materials for the third and fourth quarters

(AEA III and AEA IV) would then be created based on reflections and feedback from the first two courses.

The textbook comprised activities and resources to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and scaffolding they needed to succeed at the projects. It comprised four units (corresponding to the four content areas of language, communication, culture, and education), a speaking skills section, and a writing skills section. Each unit included QR codes and website links for authentic online material (e.g., newspaper articles, TED talks, YouTube videos). These were used in conjunction with a variety of activities designed to get students to engage with and think critically about what they read, saw or heard. The skills sections provided specific information and practice activities to help students complete the written and spoken project components. The writing section, for example, began with exercises and resources to familiarize students with the APA 6th edition format. Students were required to adhere to this format for all written assignments.

The course designers aimed to produce a textbook that allowed each instructor a degree of flexibility. At the same time, we wanted to ensure consistency when it came to the realization of course goals and implementation and assessment of projects. To this end, the textbook held a surplus of activities and resources from which each instructor could choose those best suited to his or her class and teaching style. The core projects, on the other hand, were designed to be implemented across all classes. The textbook included a separate syllabus for each quarter showing a timeline for progress through the units and projects but allowing each teacher to decide the details of which activities to use in each class.

Monitoring and Assessing

Student assessment focused on the written (40%) and spoken (40%) components of the projects, and on learner participation (e.g., homework completion and in-class effort) (20%). For spoken tasks, presentations were either graded by the instructor in real time, or, where this was not practicable, were video-recorded and graded at a later time. For both written and spoken assignments, students

were provided with clear rubrics in advance that showed how the instructor would be grading them. Rubrics focused on specific skills taught and emphasized in preparatory activities (e.g., written assignments were expected to follow the APA6 format, have a clear structure, and be well researched), as well as on the originality and critical thinking skills showed by students. Accurate use of specific language forms was not a course objective and thus was not specifically assessed, but students were taught several editing strategies and were expected to produce work that was clear and easy to understand.

Evaluating the Courses

Course designers met regularly throughout the first two quarters to discuss the progress of the course design and materials. Considerations included class atmosphere, assignment deadlines, student motivation, technical issues, necessary revisions or additions to the textbook, grading procedures, student and teacher workload, and learner development. These reflective conversations were highly valuable in identifying areas that needed to be improved and in enabling instructors to use the materials more effectively. Overall, the course designers found that the syllabus was easy to implement and the project-based approach showed benefits for student motivation and learning. As the course unfolded, teachers observed that student discussions, which initially tended to be short and somewhat stilted, grew longer and livelier, with less silence and more animation displayed by most of the students. This suggested that students were more comfortable and confident speaking English with each other. In written self-evaluations and reflective discussions completed after each of the four projects in the first two quarters, the majority of students said that they enjoyed the collaborative projects, and five students (of 57 who completed written self-evaluations) specifically commented that they felt a real sense of accomplishment in successfully completing tasks that had initially seemed quite daunting to them.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a brief overview and discussion of the creation and implementation of a series of university academic English courses. The authors

took a project-based approach and created their own course materials. Initial responses to the first two courses have been positive, and teachers have observed students growing in confidence and displaying improvement in academic, critical-thinking, and communication skills. At the culmination of the (one-year) series of courses, students will be asked to complete quantitative surveys to indicate how they perceive their own development in relation to the course goals and to provide further feedback related to the approach and teaching materials used in Academic English A. The researchers hope to be able to use this information to refine and develop materials for use in the new academic year. There is also a need to investigate the degree to which learners are able to implement skills gained in these courses in the later stages of their studies (study abroad, writing theses, etc.) for which the Academic English A courses seek to prepare them.

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Received: September 30, 2017

Accepted: November 10, 2018