

Assignment option three: Prepare a proposal for a course book, resource book or set of self-access materials which you feel will meet a genuine perceived need in your teaching context.

In this essay I will outline a proposal for a set of materials which addresses a specific need in my teaching context. I will show how these proposals link to current thinking in teaching practice, and demonstrate how this translates into practical teaching applications.

Following Bax (2003), who proposes context as a starting point from which to build a teaching practice, I shall outline who, what and where I teach, what gaps are in the syllabus, and propose new materials developed using current research and analysis.

The Context

Bax's (2003:287) analysis gives us a broad set of criteria by which to understand the teaching context and consequently influence the actual teaching and materials. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this essay so I will give a broad description and outline a few key areas which I believe impact greatly on my classroom practices.

I teach at a private Japanese Senior high school near Osaka. My proposal is for the first year of senior high school comprising seven classes each streamed according to an entrance exam, and there is a range of ability and motivation within each class. Students have four 50 minute English classes a week, three with a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and one a native speaker (NS).

Culturally, Japan is a society which values group harmony and values over the individual, where individual opinions are downplayed, and an Asian style of communication which, from a Western perspective, is "like pulling teeth" (Wiltse:2006). Educationally, students are mostly passive receptors of information which comes from Confucianism and the idea of learning mastery of a subject from a teacher/master (Igawa, 2008). From my casual observation of classes, there doesn't seem to be much interaction or discussion (output skills) as the teacher does most of the explaining of the grammar and reading skills focused material in Japanese.

The Data

Students' perceptions of English and its function in their lives, as well as ideas for material, were collected in a questionnaire that obtained quantitative and qualitative responses (fuller results in appendix 1).

Chart 1 shows the results of question 1, a 5 point scale which asked students to rate how easy or hard they felt aspects of English to be.

1) What do you think about listening (circle): Easy 1 2 3 4 5 Hard

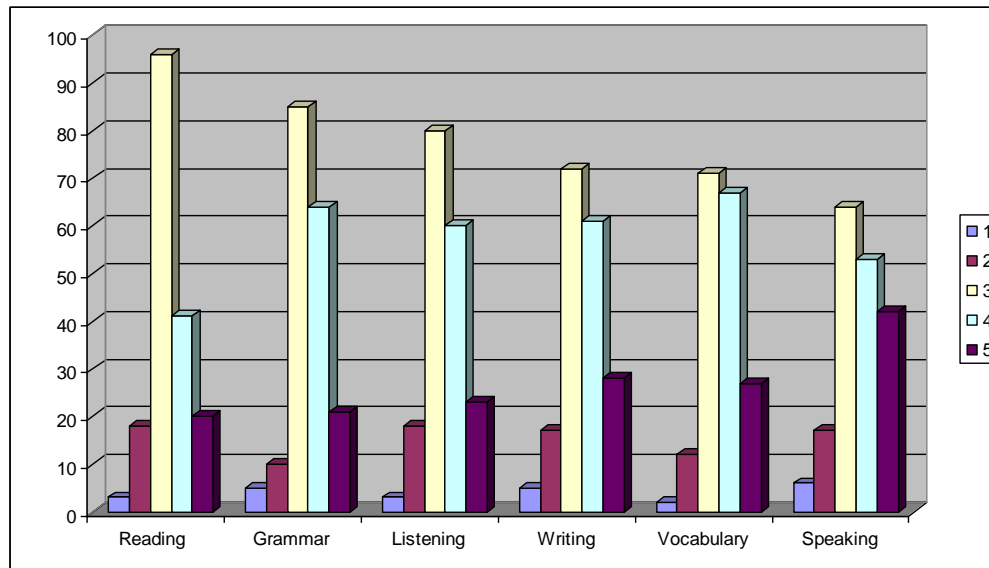


Chart 1 Responses to perceived difficulty of aspects of English.

To ascertain what skills should be the focus of the proposal, the differences between a “normal”, expected, or comfortable levels of difficulty (one, two or three), and harder levels of four or five were examined. The top three comfortable aspects were reading and grammar and listening which fits with the observation about the nature and focus of JTE classes. Speaking, writing, and vocabulary had more four or fives, implying difficulty, which supports the observation that output skills are not a focus in JTE classes and so hold more challenge for students when trying to use them.

When asked “**Do you think learning English is important? Why?**” a considerable number responded along the lines that English “is international”, a “common language in the world” with which “to speak various people” (sic) (See appendix 1b). Interestingly less than 5 respondents wanted to use English only to speak with native speakers.

The results indicate a need for materials which develop output skills and prepare students to communicate in an international context rather than just to NS which relates to the debate about English’s status as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the implications for teachers, (e.g. Kuo:2006, Seidlhofer:2005, Nelson:2006, Rajagopalan:2004) and students in terms of integration (Coetzee-Vanrooy, 2006).

Analysis of Current Teaching Materials

The current course book, World link Intro, “*is a core series for young adult / adult learners of English from the low beginning to high intermediate level. Combining dynamic vocabulary with essential grammar and universal topics, World Link helps students to communicate confidently and fluently.*” (Worldlink back cover blurb, Stempleski, 2005). An analysis of this book shows how it is structured and where its weaknesses lie when used in my context.

World Link uses most of the syllabus forms found in Richards (1990, p9; see also Hedge, 2000, p319; Skehan, 1998, p93-96; Long, 2001, ch10) but takes mostly a product approach to learning. It’s structured into units which are topically themed, for example *Activities and Interests*, *Time* and *Housing*. Within each unit there are vocabulary, listening, pronunciation, speaking, grammar, writing, and communication sections each with a range of activities and exercises. The listening sections feature

a majority of American NS; pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are exclusively American. There is some balance of information, in line with the book title, and exercises using Non Native Speakers' (NNS) cultures, but overall the focus is American¹.

There are focus on forms in the grammar section and the reading and listening have comprehension questions which often require bottom up processing (Flowerdew, 2005, p24), and answers in the form of matching, choosing an option from those presented, or correcting / transforming a sentence. The communication section offers classic Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) information gap, questionnaires, and some task based interactive activities. In general, output, even in the more free CLT sections, is fairly tightly controlled as answers are mostly a series of tick box choices, transformation exercises or answering predefined questions.

Word Link features many types of material and learning approaches. However in my context I feel it's not suitable due to its product focus. Although it does offer some cultural information about different countries which is valuable, it doesn't go in depth or offer much material to help students communicate in a NNS country. Some material is unfamiliar to the age group and cultural background which means more time is spent figuring out or explaining what is meant to happen or what the task is about rather than on task (Mercer, 2001, p255). The focus on forms throughout is more of the same from regular JTE lessons and, although they generally have no problem completing the activities, students are not very engaged. Communicative activities such as gap fill are often transacted partially in L1², and there is little variation in level which hinders less able students and doesn't push more able ones. Generally, the product nature of the book doesn't offer the student a chance to direct their own study, use their own creativity, and pursue aspects of language which interest them, or are ready to develop and restructure (Skehan, 1998, p58; Long, 2001, p 182).

The Syllabus Outline and Teaching Approach Justifications

Following Taba's model (quoted in Richards, 1990, p9) the objectives of this course book are to use a Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach to help students become independent learners, develop learning and processing strategies, practice the four skills, and raise awareness of ELF by focusing on NS and NNS cultures and how and why English is used there (for example ESL in Singapore and India). Research will inform vocabulary choices and pronunciation guides with reference to both NS and NNS Englishes. Listening will involve NNS as well as NS. There will be explicit explanations of grammar, in a "grammar glossary" at the back, which will be cross referenced throughout all of the tasks. For example, all uses of the present perfect will reference the explanation, and a list of all pages where it is used will be written in the glossary so students can quickly see how it is used in a variety of contexts enabling hypothesis development about meaning. The task based approach allows students to acquire language at their own pace and develop their interlanguage according to the stage they are at rather than imposing structures on them. Content will be selected according to results of the survey which asked the question "Write three things want to learn about, or are a problem in school, Japanese society or in the world." Results can be found in appendix 2.

Skehan's (1998, ch5) and Van den Branden's (2006) collection of research into TBLT provides the main justifications for this proposal's teaching approach. While Skehan admits that work still has to be done (Skehan, 1998, p291), Van den Branden's more recent collection of TBLT research of a full scale

¹ My students often don't really know most of the "famous people", which tend to be Anglo-American entertainment or sports stars.

² Despite lots of "cajoling" to the contrary.

implementation in Belgian schools provides strong support that it promotes efficient interlanguage development³.

While product focused materials tend to split up activities into discrete units with emphasis on producing correctly, TBLT takes a different perspective which emphasises goal, process and cognitive development over productive success. TBLT takes learners' needs (e.g. where language will be used) as a starting point for the development of tasks which describe what type and level of language is needed to achieve a successful linguistic transaction in situations encountered by the learner (Avermaet, P., in Van den Branden, 2006, p43). The parameters of task description (ibid, p32, appendix 3) give a framework from which to choose task goals. From this a goal can be derived:

“Listening at the descriptive level of information processing: the child is able to understand oral instructions for a physical action in the here and now given by a teacher e.g. ‘now we all sit down’.” (ibid, p33).

While the English teaching profession is theoretically ready to embrace ELF, empirically we remain somewhat in the dark. The debate around the implementation of ELF as a language model, as opposed to a NS English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (IATEFL Voices issues 199/200), is highlighting problems such as what variety of English to use as a standard (or should there even be one chosen for this?), and the threat of disintegration of mutual intelligibility through the fracturing of grammar, pronunciation, and lexis. Projects like VOICE and others (Fallon, 2004; Hassall, 2006; Nelson, 2006), which are NNS corpuses and common cores of language from around the ELF world, and research into ELF pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000; Deterding, 2006; Matsuura, 2007) are starting points, but as Dewey and Congo say “ELF research neither desires nor recommends that teachers abandon current practice to adopt a radically new approach” (2007, p11).

In summary, the proposal seeks to broaden the context of current materials to include ELF and teach, through tasks, cultural and linguistic information about countries throughout the world without focus solely on NS countries as the model of aspiration, and so enabling students to interact more effectively with NNS. Content areas or topics will be guided by student feedback, with materials which include humanities, the environment and social problems. There follows two example tasks which are made according to the proposal's objectives.

Example Task 1: Conversation Generator

Doernyei and Thurrell state “One of the biggest challenges to current language teaching methodology is to find effective ways of preparing students for spontaneous communication.” (1994, p40). As speaking skills are one of the biggest concerns this task will help develop students' confidence to speak while practicing the cognitive and strategic processes that help real time conversation.

The task description is: “Using the skills of reading, writing and speaking, at the level of restructuring, with peers, in the here and now, using known and unknown grammatical and lexical items, use discourse analysis to analyse common conversational genres and generate conversations”.

³ As people have been learning other languages for thousands of years without the help modern research, the point of teaching is to make the process as efficient as possible for as many people as possible.

Understanding the different types and parts of typical conversational situations is, I think, a more flexible way of developing students' confidence in spoken situations. As has been noted, ELF is becoming divorced from its NS roots and with that comes the issue of NNS cultural influences on conversational patterns and expectations. The issues of cultural and personal identity, which Jenkins thinks can "both express the identities of its L2 speakers and be a successful means for communication" (2006, p16), and integration, which may not be attainable or desirable (Coetzee-Vanrooy, 2006), means that the content of conversations will vary from culture to culture. For example, it's acceptable for Japanese to ask how old you are, and for Chinese to discuss your marital status and salary, but not so for NSs, and Nakanishi's analysis of spoken generic encounters (in Paltridge, 2006, p96-97) shows the differences between dating in Japan and America.

Therefore, while many English course books offer a NS model of conversational content, which are effectively NS cultural values (and these should be taught as part of *cultural studies*), a higher level analysis generates generic pre-content stages which allows cultural influences to manipulate the content. Another important function of this task is to get students to think strategically so that if they encounter a situation they are unfamiliar with in terms of language they can rely on a processing mechanism which provides them with a chance to guess what the interlocutor is asking for or talking about. For example when buying a train ticket there will always be certain parts to a conversation no matter where in the world you are.

The advantages of this kind of task over read and repeat exercises are that processing is much deeper, students are free to focus on language forms they are in the process of acquiring, can use creativity and so own the language, are independent learners, and use their own cultural values.

The Information Processing Model synthesised by Skehan (1998, ch3; p57) shows that the more chance speakers have to plan (*ibid*, p140), the more familiarity they have with the task (*ibid*, p113) and the type of discourse involved (*ibid*, p109) all effect the accuracy and complexity of the output. Therefore giving students time to prepare, consider form and meaning before a real time conversation situation will help students to develop their conversational skills and strategies.

The task has three stages. The worksheet (appendix 4) contains an example analysis and useful formulaic chunks, for example politeness which is common to all languages. Initially, students, in pairs or threes, choose a situation by themselves or from a selection (e.g. first meeting, buying a ticket, asking for something, complaining etc.) and brainstorm together about what parts of a conversation there are and what language needs to be used.

Secondly, students work on building up chunks of conversation which fit the stages of the conversation using their own ideas for content. At this stage the teacher, or other perhaps foreign students, can raise awareness about cultural issues, preparing students for encounters with other speakers about how a potential conversation will flow and what content to expect. Once the conversation has been written, students can practice the conversation together and gradually progress from reading to spontaneous conversation. At this stage students or the teacher can point out errors and elicit or provide correction in a focus on form exercise.

The post task involves students interacting with others outside of their group in conversations, without reference to any written material, and practice in real time the strategies, vocabulary and grammar they have just been processing. This post task element is essential in order to solidify and motivate students as Skehan points out:

“Activities which can be argued to promote effective attention allocation during the task and greater focus on accuracy are:

- Awareness of an upcoming public performance
- Awareness that task based performance will be recorded and analysed
- Tests” (1998, p148).

Example Task Two: About Global Warming

The description is: “Using reading, writing and speaking, restructure information from a news style report with peers about concrete objects in the there and then using frequent and unknown vocabulary”.

This task (appendix 5) asks the student to read and understand some information about global warming and then restructure it for an oral presentation. Many of the theoretical aspects and parts of the project proposal can be seen in this task, such as the unobtrusive focus on forms which would be cross referenced with a grammar glossary, and the three stages of task including speaking output. Although there isn't much in the way of ELF in terms of content, it does localise the issue in the speech stage by asking students to talk about what will happen in Japan as a result of global warming which means they have to bridge a gap with their own knowledge using grammar and vocabulary. A similar task incorporating explicit ELF content might be a history of English around the world, how and why English is used today, or information about other cultures and how that influences the use of English (for example how social norms are transparently reproduced in English which students should be aware of when encountering speakers from other countries, and considering how their own value influence how they use English).

Conclusions

In summary, I have examined the needs of my students, the current course material and current thinking about teaching English to speakers of other languages. I have concluded that ELF is a reality which isn't well represented in current teaching materials, and that many teaching materials use an approach which may not necessarily help students acquire language in the most efficient way. To remedy this situation I have proposed a course book which uses TBLT as an approach which is more flexible as it enables students to learn at their own pace and level, and content that is more oriented to the ELF context in which we live and teach. I have demonstrated how TBLT tasks look, although a weakness of this has been a lack of ELF specific content. However given that the proposal offers clear guidelines about the rationale behind this, content development is clearly outlined.

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Appendix 1a

Responses to the question how do you feel about aspects of English language on a 1-5 point scale of difficulty.

	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	3	18	96	41	20
Grammar	5	10	85	64	21
Listening	3	18	80	60	23
Writing	5	17	72	61	28
Vocabulary	2	12	71	67	27
Speaking	6	17	64	53	42

Table 1 Shows the number responses for each level of difficulty for each aspect of English, sorted in descending order from easiest to hardest according to the number of responses of 3, 4 and 5.

Appendix 1b

A sample of qualitative results in response to the question **“Do you think learning English is important? Why?”**

- “Yes because English is a common language in the world”
- “Because when I went to foreign countries being able to speak English is important”
- “Yes I do, English is very international”
- “Yes I do. It’s a international language”
- “Yes I do I want to pass the examination”
- “Yes I do. Because English is spoken around the world”
- “Yes I do. Because Japan get international recently”
- “Yes. Because many foreign people are in Japan”
- “Yes I do. Because English is used in a lot of country”
- “Yes. Because, I think English is common language in the world”

A sample of qualitative results in response to the question **“Do you want to speak English? Why?”**

- “No I don’t because here is Japan”
- “Yes I do. Because I want to make a lot of friends in the world”
- “Yes I want to use English at job”
- “Yes. It is interesting to talk with foreigner”
- “No I don’t because I’m Japanese”
- “Yes, Because I’ll learn English that I can make many friends”
- “No I don’t like English”
- “I want to learn more conversational English, not like grammar thing”
- “Yes I do. If I can speak English I will so cool”

Appendix 2

Qualitative results from the survey regarding areas of interest for students.

Q: Write three things you want to learn about.

The results from this were condensed into general topic areas.

The Environment: 32

Culture: 19

Humanities (e.g. history, art, geography, languages, music): 56

Science: 14

Social problems (war, homelessness, bullying): 26

Within the results for humanities, students wanted to learn about world and Japanese history and music over other subjects.

Many were concerned with environmental problems like global warming and pollution.

Culture and social problems were also noted, particularly foreign cultures and war.

Appendix 3

List of parameters effecting task description. Avermaet, P., in Van den Branden, 2006, p32

Skill	Speaking, listening, reading or writing, or a combination of certain skills
Text genre	Instruction, story, answer to a question, question, account (e.g. of a personal experience), or description
Information processing	Copying level, descriptive level, restructuring level and evaluative level of information processing (see below)
Interlocutor	Oneself, familiar peer, unfamiliar peer, familiar adult, unfamiliar adult
Topic	Physical and mental actions, concrete objects, personal experiences, experiences of others, personal opinions, feelings, desires, and those of others
Contextual support	The 'here-and-now' versus the 'there-and-then'
Linguistic features	Frequent word list, frequent formulae, list of basic grammar rules, basic insights with regard to reading and writing

Appendix 4

Example of worksheet to analyse and generate generic conversations:

Let's talk: Making Conversations

In this lesson you will think about types of conversation, words and grammar to use and make your own conversation with a partner. After, you will talk with other students in the class without reading anything from these notes.

Part 1: Here is an example of a conversation when you buy a ticket in England or America.

Stage:	Examples:	Conversation:
Start	Excuse me. Can you help me?	A: Excuse me, I want to go to London. B: Single or return?
Asking for a ticket	I'd like to buy a ticket I want to go to	A: Return. When is the next train? B: 253 platform 4
Answer	When do you want to go? Single or return?	A: How much? B: 54 pounds 30 pence
Asking for times	What time does it leave? When does it leave?	A: Thanks
Answer	At	
Asking for the price	How much is it?	
Answer	It's	
Close	Thank you.	

Part 2: Choose a situation. Think about the stages of the conversation.

Situations: First meeting with someone, Buying a ticket, Inviting someone out to a movie or dinner, Asking for something, Complaining, Talking about movies or TV shows, your own free choice.

Now write the stages of the conversation, some examples of words or sentences and then a whole conversation. Imagine you're talking with a Chinese or Korean. What would they say?

Stage:	Examples:	Conversation

Part 3: Now talk with other students in the class. First, ask them what situation they are talking about. This gives you a hint about the stages of the conversation. Try and complete the conversation. Good luck!

Appendix 5 Global Warming

Example task about an environmental topic which aims to make the students restructure information for an oral presentation. Follows on the next two pages.

About Global Warming

1: Do scientists agree about global warming?

Scientists *who study the climate* do not agree how fast the earth *is warming* and how much it *will* warm, but they do agree that the earth *is warming* and that it *will* keep warming if we don't do anything about it.



5: What is causing global warming?

Most scientists agree that burning fossil fuels like oil and coal put greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide, into the air causing most of the warming. Another cause is cutting down trees *which use carbon dioxide*.



What will happen if global warming continues?

10: There *may* be some kinds of plants and animals that become extinct (disappear completely) because they can't move to new homes. There *may* be more storms and floods. Sea level *may* rise and people *may* have to move away from the sea. Some areas *may* become too dry for farming.



What can I do about global warming?

15: Many scientists agree that burning fossil fuels *is causing* global warming. Because these fuels *are burned* for energy, everyone can help stop global warming by using less energy.



Think about the things you do each day that use energy. The lights in your house 20: use electricity. The TV and computer use electricity. The washing machine, dishwasher and dryer use gas or electricity. Every time you ride in your car, it uses gasoline.

There are some very simple things that everyone can do to help stop global warming:

Turn off the lights when you leave a room. Use fluorescent bulbs in your room.

25: Turn off your computer or the TV when you're not using it. Unplug chargers when not in use.

Take shorter showers. Heating water uses energy.

Dress warmly when it's cold, instead of turning up the heat.

29: Plant a tree.



Grammar:

Line 2 *who study the climate* Relative clause

Line 3/4, 4/5 *is warming* Present progressive

Line 3 *will* future

Line 8 *which use carbon dioxide* Relative clause

Line 11, 12, 13 *May* modal auxiliary

Line 15 *is causing* Present progressive

Line 16 *are burned* Passive voice

Environment: About Global Warming

This lesson is about global warming. You will read a report about global warming, how it is affecting the Earth, and what you can do to stop it. After you read the report, you will give a short speech to the class to explain what global warming is and how to stop it.

Part 1 Before you read (10 minutes)

Write what you think global warming is.

I think global warming is _____.

Write down two things that global warming is doing to the Earth.

- 1
- 2

Now write down two things you can do to stop global warming:

- 1
- 2

Part 2 Reading (20 minutes)

Read the report. Find the meanings of words you don't know in a dictionary

English	Japanese	English	Japanese

Part 3 After reading (20 minutes)

Now write a short speech to explain global warming and the problems of global warming in Japan. These questions will help you:

- What is global warming?
- What causes it?
- How can we stop it?
- How is global warming affecting Japan?