

# **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE: THE CASE OF A TRAINEE TEACHER COURSE IN JAPAN**

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## **Abstract**

This project employed the curriculum design model by Macalister and Nation (2010) to improve an existing teacher-training course in Tokyo, Japan. In this paper, I describe the curriculum design methodology and how it was used to conduct an environmental analysis. Next, I describe outcomes of the first year of teaching and some implications for future curriculum design adaptations. The aim of the project is an improved course design and greater alignment with education and linguistic goals for the trainee teachers who participate in the course. Qualitative analysis of comments was done using a theoretical framework from the field of engagement studies, where engagement can be evaluated as cognitive, affective, and social (Svalberg, 2007, 2009). It is hoped that through examining this curriculum that the current knowledge about L2 literary reading and learner autonomy in the content-based context can be improved.

## **1 Introduction**

Curriculum design is an organic, dynamic process which is continuously in a state of change. Nation and Macalister (2010) see curriculum design as a kind of writing activity, which means that it can be viewed as a type of process. Other curriculum design models use similar approaches, including Brown (1995) and Graves (2000). In Japan at the current time, there is a growing surge of interest in English language teaching and teacher development, and in English language education this is more acute than before. As the country prepares for the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, English language programs face scrutiny, and course developers should be prepared to respond to these inquiries in a principled and strategic way. In this paper, I describe recent changes to one teaching license course. The article aims to justify and explain the processes involved in the design of one specific course which may apply to other contexts also. Therefore, it should be possible to view dynamic curriculum design as mutually beneficial to students and teachers.

During the 2017-18 academic year (April-March in Japan) I made some changes to various elements of a tertiary level English teacher license course. The course, entitled Literature A/B runs twice in the year and is a required element of the teaching license at a private university in Tokyo. The approach was to use the Nation and Macalister (2010) curriculum design framework, which breaks curriculum design into several constituent parts, each worth careful consideration, and attention. These parts are needs analysis, environment analysis, and learning principles. Nation and Macalister provide 20 learning principles which can be given various

levels of priority and suggest that course designers should be aware of all the principles and select from these the most useful and relevant ones. The current paper will only report briefly on the selection principles, as this report is part of a larger ongoing project.

As advised by Nation and Macalister (2010), the purpose of these considerations is to be able to ensure that the course will be “suitable, practical and realistic” (p.5). While this short article describes in summary the process of analyzing and understanding environment, the process itself takes considerable time and is likely to be reviewed over a period of months. The following is a brief overview of an ongoing project, with tentative results from an initial-stage analysis of the elements of curriculum design in this particular course.

## **2 Language curriculum design: A brief overview**

Curriculum design includes evaluation of an existing course. Steps to complete are suggested by this sequence of instructions:

1. Examine the environment.
2. Assess needs.
3. Decide on principles.
4. Set goals and choose and sequence content.
5. Design the lesson format.
6. Include assessment procedures.
7. Evaluate the course.

(Nation and Macalister, 2010, p.11)

The time taken to conduct and review all aspects of these steps can be one semester, one year, or longer, depending on the complexity of the course and the difficulty of working through each point. With a course taught by one teacher, in one location and with a student body whose goals and learning backgrounds are relatively homogenous, this could be shortened. In the case of this current study, the steps took one academic year to complete, and the evaluation of changes made as a result of the initial investigation are ongoing. The process can also be represented in a diagrammatic way, with the goals in the centre of the image, and the decisions informing principles, needs and environment as supporting details. The benefit of visualizing the process in this way is that all of the details related to curriculum design can be seen as connected and the diagram supports the assertion that the process is dynamic and can cope with ongoing change. Although this short article does not go into detail about the content and sequencing, monitoring and assessment and format and presentation (see Figure 1), these factors were also evaluated as part of the curriculum design analysis in 2017. As a result of the first year of teaching the new course in 2018, I expect to report on these elements in a subsequent study on this topic. In the next section, I begin with the first on this list, “examine the environment”.

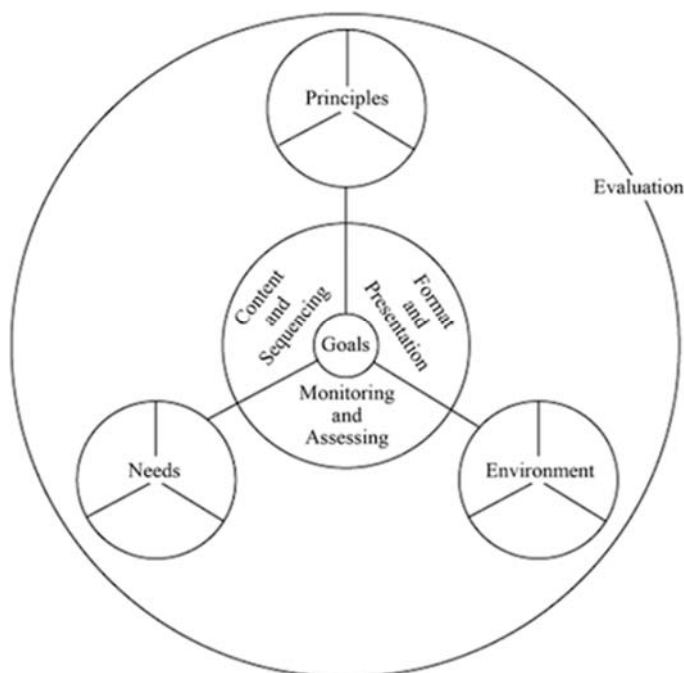


Fig. 1. Elements of the curriculum design model (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p.3)

### 2.1 Environment analysis

Environment analysis is a term used by Tessmer (1990) to describe the process of examining factors which will have an effect on a course. Sometimes also referred to as “situation analysis” (Richards, 2001), environment analysis includes consideration of issues such as constraints which the teacher has to work with. For example, in a course which only meets once a week, a constraint could be the issue of time. The first language of the students in the class and the expectations or requirements of the institution are also examples of issues related to environment analysis. Nation and Macalister have emphasized the value of ongoing attention to environmental factors in curriculum design and planning:

“Ongoing needs and environment analysis: the selection, ordering, presentation, and assessment of the material in a language course should be based on a continuing careful consideration of the learners and their needs, the teaching conditions, and the time and resources available (Nation and Macalister, 2010, p.7).”

Beginning with the teacher’s own interpretation of the course environment, Nation and Macalister suggest that teachers should prioritize a manageable number of factors and then consider these issues for the participants in the course. In this particular case, I selected the following three factors as being important for the development of the course:

1. *The wide range of proficiency in the class: students from second, third and fourth grade at the undergraduate level.*
2. *The need for the learners to develop greater autonomy: some of the students would become English teachers on completing the course.*

3. *The small amount of time available for the course: one meeting per week.*

Environment analysis next involves a consideration of the effects of the factors. The first issue, mixed-level students, became apparent the first year I taught the class (in 2016). The wide range of English language ability amongst the students had the effect of creating gaps in understanding from week to week. I decided to incorporate collaborative group work and reading tasks for homework which could scaffold learning, alongside opportunities for comprehension questions to be asked and answered in the group and teacher-led tasks.

The issue of greater learner autonomy is related to the academic purpose of the course as part of the teaching license program. In Japan, students can take accredited courses which are part of their primary degree alongside additional classes on ethics, education theory and practical teaching. Not all of the participants in the course are simultaneously taking the teaching license course, but a significant number are doing so, and some will go on to teach after they graduate. Being one of the few opportunities for learners to use English in a real-world classroom environment, some students expressed concerns that they wanted to gain confidence in using English. The effect of this need for greater learner autonomy was that I decided to create several opportunities for micro-teaching tasks, including an evaluation task at the end of the course which is a group teaching demonstration. Both assessments, worth 20% of the course grade each, must be completed by all students regardless of whether or not they will go on to teach English. This assessment replaces traditional grade paper or examination and provides the opportunity for independent learning, which can lead to increased learner autonomy.

The third factor related to the environment is typical of many courses which contain a substantial reading element, and that is the issue of time. Although we had 14 weeks of lessons which met for 100 minutes, the amount of teaching time was less because of several classes dedicated to assessments. The main effect of this time constraint is finding time to read all of the course text, in this case, a class novel. One consideration in the materials design was the careful consideration of the selection of the novel for the course. Manageable chapter lengths and opportunities to read about the background of the book through secondary sources online, as well as the availability of a translated version of the text (for those students who requested such support) were all considerations related to time. In 2017 the novel in the second semester was *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.

## 2.2 *Needs analysis*

Needs analysis is a term used to broadly refer to the necessities (what the learners need), lacks (what they do not have yet) and wants (what they think that they need). The difference between lacks and wants could be small, or it could be quite significant, depending on various factors. For young learners who are not as likely to understand their own learning needs, then the lacks (as interpreted by the teacher) could be important to consider. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) initially made the distinction between these areas, and Nation and Macalister (2010) elaborated on how teachers can go about finding out more about these distinct aspects of any particular course. Specific to the literature reading course in this study, the following aspects are relevant to consider:

- *Needs: Development of reading skills and close reading strategies. Productive skills of speaking and writing.*

- *Lacks: Prior learning of English literature. Experience reading a longer text in a classroom context. Familiarity with literature teaching practices.*
- *Wants: Some students want to become teachers, and they require support in developing teaching skills and confidence. Other students are taking the class for English proficiency goals.*

This initial interpretation of needs could help provide guidance on how next to investigate the topic. Related to this specific course is the novel, in particular the choice of novel. Through analyzing the needs, lacks and wants, and through asking students their thoughts on what they want to learn, developing a course which aligns learner and course goals more successfully can be achieved.

### ***2.3 Learning principles***

Learning principles are pedagogically based and can come from theories of general education, first language learning, or second language learning. Nation and Macalister list 20 different principles (p. 38) which can be readily adapted for use in learning materials and lesson plans. In the case of the current study, principles from the content and sequencing sub-list include 1) the use of comprehensible input 2) involving strategies for learner autonomy and 3) creating opportunities for output. Once these have been selected, it is possible to then work with existing materials and develop them further with the principles in mind.

## **3 Participants, research objectives and definitions**

### ***3.1 Participants***

Student participants (N:22) participated in the course survey at the end of the course of study. The course survey aimed to improve the class for future years. The questionnaire was given in English and Japanese and instructions for completion were also given in both languages. Participants were instructed that in giving their answers that the information would be used to help evaluate the course of study and would be used to improve the course for future years. Students were asked to write comments in English or Japanese and could complete all of the questions if they wanted, or to leave some questions unanswered. The answers given would not be part of the grade for the course and students were given the option to participate in the questionnaire or to decline to participate. Participants did not write their names on the questionnaire and agreed on submitting the questionnaire that their answers could be used for research purposes. All participants completed the survey at the end of the class near the end of the semester, and the responses were hand-written on the question sheet. The results described here are selected from the total data set.

### ***3.2 Objective of the current study***

The main objective of the current study is to attend to student needs, lacks and wants with curriculum design principles in mind. The wide range of abilities, the need for greater learner autonomy and the limited time available are all factors which arose from the initial evaluation. To achieve this objective, I developed some questions for students at the end of the 2017 academic year and selected results from the questionnaire are used to answer the following research questions:

1. What do learners want and need to learn in a literature reading teacher training course?
2. What do comments about the course reveal about learner engagement (cognitive, affective and social)?

### ***3.3 Definition of engagement with language (EWL)***

In general terms engagement is what learners do, think, and feel while they are involved in a particular activity. The term engagement is defined in different fields in a variety of ways, and the term has been used in general education as well as language studies. In the current study, I make use of the Svalberg (2007, 2009) definition of Engagement With Language (EWL) referring to it as cognitive engagement, affective engagement, and social engagement. To do this, I used learner responses to a needs analysis questionnaire aimed at investigating their preferences for the type of activities that they would want to work within a teaching license course. From the field of language awareness (LA), the field of research concerned with explicit knowledge about language teaching and language use. Svalberg argues that learners and teachers create LA through EWL. Examples of cognitive engagement are when learners seem focused on tasks, which may also result in critical analysis or reflective learning. Affective engagement in this framework is when learners appear to like or show a positive disposition towards an activity, which may also result in greater autonomy or self-directed learning. In a reading class, this could be seen from enthusiasm for reading on and completing learning activities, enjoying the process of reading and reflection which follows from it. The third aspect of EWL, social engagement, is when a learner appears to be interactive, supportive of others, or shows some element of social development which a course may wish to encourage, such as leadership skills. In Svalberg's model, the original idea was to look at interactions and spoken language, although more broadly this can be taken to mean uses of communication, including written comments. In the next section, I discuss answers to one of the questions in the course survey where students wrote about types of activities which could be useful in the next year's class.

## **4 Results**

### ***4.1 Research question 1: What do learners want to learn in a literature reading teacher training course?***

At the end of the 2017-18 academic year, all students completed a course survey. They answered the question "Do you think these activities could be used successfully in this class?" (see Figure 2) using a five-point Likert scale. The highest mark of 5 was given if students strongly agreed with the statement, with the lowest mark of 1 being strongly disagree. From Figure 2 it is possible to see that the two most popular activities were "learning how to combine literature and language teaching" (4.47) and "learning how to manage groups and classroom dynamics" (4.29). Two more received generally positive responses and an average score of 4.0. These were "how literature is taught around the world" and "delivering a lesson using literature". The least popular type of activity was, perhaps unsurprisingly "writing a research paper on literature teaching". Students were given the chance to write comments after at the end of this section of the questionnaire and could continue to write suggestions for the course in section 4.2 which is discussed with reference to learner engagement.

### Do you think these activities could be used successfully in this class?

下記の活動のどれが教員免許取得コースにおいて学ぶ際に有効だと考えますか。 1=strongly disagree強く反対 2=disagree反対 3=neutral どちらでもない 4=agree賛成 5=strongly agree強く賛成



Fig. 2. Results of student survey question on learning activities in the literature reading class

The results to this question appear to suggest that students in the class were interested in activities which would stretch their current understanding and have a practical purpose. “Learning how to combine literature and language teaching”, as the most popular results seem to suggest that learners are keen to activate their interest in reading alongside teaching pedagogy. This answer was somewhat surprising since it suggests that the learners are already considering the real-world use of the course in its relation to English teaching. Unlike some academic reading courses, which aim to teach proficiency, reading skills or vocabulary, the special character of this course is the content it utilizes, which students appear to have understood and interpreted successfully. More investigation of this is required to find out exactly how students see literature and language learning, which is a possible next stage of this project. “Learning how to manage groups and classroom dynamics” rated higher than expected, which could reflect the students’ desire for greater use of group work throughout their classroom tasks or a need for more pedagogical input in this area. “How literature is taught around the world” is a topic which I have added to the 2018 curriculum in the first semester to provide a wide-lens through which it is later possible to focus. In 2018, for example, we have read Kazuo Ishiguro’s book *Never Let Me Go*, which is translated and taught widely around the world. Students have expressed an interest in the international appeal of literature and seem to be keen to find out more about how the world reads books in school contexts. While the answers to this question serve as an essential first stage in understanding the interests and needs of the students in this course, more detail is required to get a better impression of the engagement learners have had in the course overall. In the next section, by looking at some student comments, I aim to consider these aspects of the students’ engagement with the course materials and suggestions for future classes.

#### 4.2 Research question 2: What do comments about the course reveal about learner engagement (cognitive, affective and social)?

Students wrote explanatory comments after selecting answers for the question “Do you think these could be used successfully in this class?”. EWL is when learners are interested in and

notice various elements of language learning or other learning in a class. In the example from student 1, there is a positive disposition towards the learning. The comment from student 1 can be interpreted as an example of affective engagement in the sense that the student uses “good” to describe a general approach to reading the novel, and cognitive engagement is seen in the repeated use of “I think” as a kind of meta-cognitive strategy. The use of a Japanese idiom, 温故知新[*onkochishin*], from Chinese, means to study the past and get new knowledge. The use of this phrase could also be considered an example of cognitive engagement, as it leads to consideration of the deeper meaning of reflection and learning. During this particular semester, the novel was *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, a political satire which contains an allegorical message about revolution and totalitarianism. It is not surprising, then, to note that these particular comments are related to history and politics.

温故知新。歴史を学べるようなものだと思うので小説を使って授業をすすめるのは良いと思う。Learning from the past. I think that it is good to recommend classes using novels as I think that it is like learning history.

Student 1

In the second example from another student, there is a focus on personal involvement and reflective learning. The language-focused activity of looking closely at short quotes, or idiomatic expressions used in a novel may have come from precious experiences of learning in Japanese literature classes. Translation of literature word-for-word is a common feature of L1 literacy practices in Japan. This attention to smaller details may be considered to be cognitive engagement as it could lead to consideration of wider issues such as universal themes present in the reading. The comment does not mention theme directly, however, and instead links the learning to the concrete such as cultural differences. *Animal Farm* of course reveals differences, but its key message to the original readers, and the reason why it has been considered a subversive book for so long is its message that the farm bears some similarity to the real world we may be experiencing. While the comment begins with a statement which could lead to analysis, the justification given shows only developing cognitive engagement. Repetition of “interested/interesting” begins to show some affective engagement, although this is not explored in detail.

小説が書かれたときの時代背景や文化に興味があります。また、小説の中で使われている表現方法やイディオムをより深く学習することでその国の言語の特性や文化の違いなどを学べて面白いと思います。I am interested in the background and culture when the novel was written. In addition, I think that learning more about the expressions and idiom used in the novel, it is interesting to learn the characteristics of language and cultural differences of the country.

Student 2

In the next example, student 3 focuses on the practical and real-world examples of using the class as a place to practice teaching. Social engagement appears here to be from the student’s awareness of others, and consideration of their learning as part of the overall experience. The student appears to consider the processes involved in teaching and learning, as these are not simply to perform lessons, but to carefully consider activities. The emphasis on the repeated word “how” allows this to be seen as an example of cognitive engagement.



教職の生徒がもっとも学びたいのは文学作品を使った授業の作り方だと思いました。アクティビティや進め方、計画の作り方を学べるとよい。I thought that the trainee teachers wanted to learn the most was the way of making lessons using literary works. Learn about how to make activities, how to proceed, how to make plans.

Student 3

Overall, through the simple consideration of cognitive, affective and social engagement with comments about the course materials, it appears that a variety of learning experiences are gained from such tasks as learning about background, teaching with literature and developing lesson plans. While these comments only provide a snapshot of opinions and can only be viewed as part of the puzzle, it is hoped that through consideration of students' reflective comments that successful adaptations to the curriculum design can be achieved.

### **5 Implications for teaching: Developing new course goals**

“Having a clear statement of goals is important for determining the content of the course” (Nation and Macalister, 2010, p.7). In response to the needs analysis and evaluation of the student needs, wants and lacks, I developed new curriculum learning objectives for the 2017-18 academic year. An additional source for this stage in the curriculum development was the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) goals for reading (CEFR, 2018). Particular to literature reading, as Jones and Carter (2011) is the issue of the reader's place in the process of reading and interpreting literature, which can lead to greater awareness of language the functions of spoken language. In a previous version of the course goals there was no reference to the CEFR framework. The new course goals have become, in 2018:

1. To develop understanding of a long and complex English text.
2. To learn about the distinct feature of style in literature with the reader in mind.
3. To show understanding of contemporary literary prose through classroom interaction and a range of written/spoken tasks.
4. To develop skills of expression in writing and speaking while interacting with an English novel.
5. To continue developing academic skills to describe character, setting and theme in a novel.

Through examining existing content and also by adapting the course materials to become more explicitly related to literature reading and interpretation, it is hoped that some of the students' needs, lacks and wants can be addressed. While course design remains dynamic and must of course change with new factors such as constraints, it is hoped that attention to this aspect of the course design helps to determine the content of the course and for helping to focus on aspects which are useful for learners taking this class in the future.

### **6 Conclusion and areas for future research**

It is useful and necessary to conduct curriculum design projects and investigations to help teachers and departments continue to adapt courses suitably. While curriculum designers seek to explain their curriculum design choices in a changing educational ecology, learners are looking for ways to develop their voices, autonomy, and ideas in all types of learning contexts.

The outcome of any curriculum design investigation should be not only of relevance to those teaching second language acquisition but other fields of teacher training and development also. The first question I aimed to investigate here was “What do learners want and need to learn in a literature reading teacher training course?” and it is clear that a short survey with brief comments is only the first step in attempting to answer this question. From this paper, there is not yet any quantifiable evidence to support the claim that learners are looking for significant changes to the existing course and sequencing of activities. Although the highest rated activities were all education related, it is not entirely clear whether or not this rating was given because such tasks promote learner engagement.

The second question I sought to investigate in this study was “What do comments about the course reveal about learner engagement (cognitive, affective and social)?”. From the discussion of the selected comments from learners, it is clear that there is some use in the EWL framework to help categorize and evaluate learner opinions. However, these are in the current study only qualitative comments and do not use statistical analysis to compare the types and frequencies of the different levels of engagement. It should be possible to look further at this topic through the design of a separate research instrument, and through some triangulation of data. If time and availability allowed, it would be useful to get group discussions or focus groups for research purposes on looking at opinions and ideas in more depth. Further investigation of the topic could include a closer look at individual activities and learner reflections, possibly in real-time as they occur in the classroom, to make more definite assertions about the needs and wants of students.

The responses to this curriculum development student survey suggest that learners are interested in connecting practical teaching with the reading of literature, which is a view that I also share. Learners in this course have also expressed a wish to learn more about the connections between reading literature and teaching literature. The gap in understanding how literature can be used in different contexts for a variety of aims continues to be an area of focus for literature teachers and research practitioners, and we welcome more investigation into this area.

The next stage of the project aims to reveal more specific feedback on individual tasks and lessons, with the learners’ needs and wants in mind. As a result of the 2017-18 investigation, new course texts were selected in sync with the interests of learners. Through this study, it is hoped that the various ways in which learners are engaging with the tasks can be more thoroughly understood.

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