

Collaborating to Develop the Content-Based Core English Language Program in the School of Global Governance and Collaboration

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1. Introduction

The systematic design and implementation of an English language learning curriculum is the subject of this report explaining how Mr. Daniel Lumley (henceforth Mr. Lumley) and I collaborated to develop the Core English (CE) and Power Up Tutorial (PUT) courses as a part of the Core English Language Program (CELP) for the launch of the Department of Global Governance and Collaboration (Collabo) in the new School of Global Governance and Collaboration founded in 2017. In the first part, I will describe the design and implementation of the CE program starting with the historical origins of the original CELP program, and in the second part, Mr. Lumley will focus on the PUT program and how it differs from the other PUT programs at NUFS.

This new CELP program was established while integrating concepts of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and content-based instruction (CBI). “Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is an approach to foreign language learning that requires the use of a second language to practise content” (Zarobe, Y. R., & María, J. C., 2009). In other words, the class begins with a focus on the “content” while linking the four skills (reading, writing,

speaking and listening) of language learning. The content for the Collabo English curriculum, especially from the second year, focuses on global issues due to the overall theme of the department:

Striving to build a better international community by learning about the current circumstances and ideologies such as peace, freedom, and democracy. Learning a broad range of knowledge required for multicultural societies: from human psychology to global civilizations. (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies – School of Global Governance and Collaboration, n.d)

Moreover, principles of communicative language teaching and task-based learning and teaching also inform the teaching methodology. The most important feature of the Collabo CELP program is the integration of all the English classes across the English curriculum. Curriculum integration means that the content topic of each unit of the CE class is also the focus of study in the PUT classes as well as the non-CELP classes that include the reading classes and the academic writing classes. Each unit or topic is covered over a three week period, and there are four units per semester.

2. From the origins of the NUFs CELP program to the development of the Collabo CELP program

In 2013, when I was a member of the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT), my colleague Mr. Mathew White (henceforth Mr. White) and I were asked to be part of a task force to create what was to become the basis for the current Core English program for the School of Foreign Studies, and that I would be the “shunin” or coordinator of the project. The basic specification for the development of this course was that it not be a traditional grammar-based course, but rather a course based on content with a topic or thematic focus. Since

that was exactly the type of English curriculum that we had already successfully developed for DELT, not to mention that it would also be replacing a part of the original DELT curriculum, we agreed to collaborate to pilot teaching materials that we had created before rolling out the new Core English program.

The pilot class that Mr. White and I pair-taught took place during the 2014 academic year with one class of freshman students in the Department of British and American Studies (Eibe) in what used to be called the General English program. The teaching materials for this pilot class were based on the DELT English program and included content-based materials taught through a communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology that includes many opportunities for student output in the form of speaking and writing. Four related characteristics of a CLT teaching methodology, according to Brown (2007), are as follows:

1. Classroom goals are focused on *all* of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that *enable* the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to *use* the language, productively and receptively in *unrehearsed* contexts. (p. 245)

Furthermore, another principle that informed the development of the original DELT curriculum is the “Four Strands Approach” advocated by Nation and Yamamoto (2011) which include:

1. Meaning-focused input from reading and listening
2. Deliberate attention to language features (vocabulary, grammar, features of discourse)
3. Meaning-focused output from speaking and writing
4. Focus on fluency for the four skills

Another informing principle of the CE program that was carried over from the DELT English curriculum is the focus on task-based learning activities. Task-based learning means that learners engage in meaningful production of language to achieve a particular outcome in the form of a “task”. A task means a real-world activity with the primary focus on meaning and the completion of the task, while assessment is based on the outcome of the task (Skehan, 1998 as cited in Willis and Willis, 2007). A framework for the task cycle put forth by Willis (2005) includes three stages: Stage 1, the Pre-task, in which the topic and task is introduced, Stage 2, the Task cycle, in which learners plan and then complete a task that ends with a report, and Stage 3, Language focus, in which students analyze the language that was produced during the task and who might practice the task again following the analysis. For the CE program, one of the key elements of the task cycle is the video recording of student dialogs as the final task followed by the language focus and analysis based on the transcription of the video recording.

During the pilot program, I alone had the duty to further polish and develop these task and content-based materials for the very first CE program to be rolled out in 2015. At the same time, I was asked to handle the duty of recruiting, interviewing, and hiring the first CELP program teachers for the newly estab-

lished Center for Language Education and Development (CLED) which would primarily be in charge of teaching the CELP courses. From April 2014, the recruitment and hiring process began, and then from April 2015 with the newly-hired CLED instructors, the CELP program was born, and the first CE classes started. Although I was not teaching the CE classes, I continued to coordinate the program for the first semester, and during that time, I encouraged the newly-hired CLED teachers to continue to refine and further develop the materials to match their own teaching styles, but also keep to the essence of the original intention of the materials that I had created.

From the second semester of 2015, I was asked to begin preparations for the development of another English curriculum for a new faculty to be called the School of Global Governance and Collaboration (Collabo) that was being established to start from the 2017 academic year. With the experience of developing two English curriculums under my belt, I felt more confident to roll up my sleeves and get started once again. Fortunately, this curriculum development was to become a much more collaborative project with the addition of Mr. Lumley who was also asked to join the new “Collabo” department from the School of Contemporary International Studies. Together we began discussions on the vision we had for the English curriculum based on the departmental goals of “global governance and collaboration” and on how we would implement a similar content-based approach to the language learning curriculum that I had created for the first CE program.

For the teaching delivery of the Collabo CELP program, it was decided by the university’s board of directors to outsource the hiring of instructors through a contract agreement with the reputable British Council (BC). In all honesty, initially I was unequivocally opposed to that arrangement because I thought it better to directly hire experienced university teachers, but the decision had already been made. Therefore, the next step was to begin collaborating with personnel from the British Council to plan and develop the Collabo CELP program. In our first

meeting which took place on the NUFS campus in July 2016, we laid out our vision and ideas for a communicative student-centered task-based course based on thematic topics through a content and language integrated approach (CLIL), but official planning began via a series of email threads and teleconferencing meetings from early September.

In conjunction with the theme of the Collabo department, we wanted to choose topics and themes that would address global and United Nations-related issues, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as the elimination of hunger and poverty, access to education and clean water, the development of sustainable cities and communities, and gender equality. Furthermore, we wanted the Collabo CELP program to be directly integrated with the non-CELP English courses that we would be teaching such as Critical Reading for Global Issues (CRGI) and Writing and Presentation (WP) with each thematic unit of study to last three weeks. In my experience, I have found it difficult to find any commercial textbooks for language learning that suit the type of CLIL and task-based communicative language teaching methodologies that I use, especially for the topic content that I find interesting and useful for my learners, so traditionally I have developed my own original teaching materials customized for my courses.

However, due to the time constraints that we were facing, the coordinator for university course development at the BC was strongly in favor of choosing a commercial textbook for the basis of the program rather than creating original materials. He suggested textbooks from the four-level “Unlock” series published by Cambridge University Press mainly because it did seem to match some of our requirements as it focuses on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and there were actually two textbooks per level, one focusing on reading and writing, and the other focusing on speaking and listening. In addition, the Unlock series is supplemented with an online workbook for student assignments as well as a learning management system (LMS) for teachers to track learner progress which

has automated marking functions.

The next step for Mr. Lumley and I was to determine two things: which level of the Unlock series to use, and then which thematic units to choose that could be integrated with the non-CELP English courses. Based on our teaching experience and expertise, we determined that most of the freshman students entering NUFS would most likely be at the A2 CEFR level. CEFR stands for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and “was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency” (Introduction to CEFR, n.d.). Therefore, “Unlock, Level 2” was chosen as it is targeted to the A2 CEFR level. Students, after completing one academic year of using this textbook are expected to be closer to the B1 CEFR level.

Furthermore, we decided that both of the textbooks for this level could be used since the CE program was to be a course that meets twice a week focusing on all four language skills, with one class that would focus on speaking and listening, and the other on reading and writing. Keeping in mind the importance of integration with the other non-CELP courses, we then set out to evaluate the potential for topic and content development based on the units in the Unlock text. Since there were ten units and we only needed four per semester, it was a matter of eliminating two topics. At the same time, we discussed the potential for essay topics and discourse modes, such as “comparison and contrast”, “narrative”, “cause and effect”, “argumentative”, and “description” and brainstormed possible essay topics. This would also have an influence on the type of current authentic news articles that we would need to choose for the reading class that we hoped the students would be using to influence and support their essay writing. (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

1st Semester	Unlock Unit	Reading News Article Topic	Writing Discourse Mode and Topic
Unit 1	Places	W1: <i>Kyushu's Efforts to Encourage People to Move to Mishima</i> W2: <i>Life in the City vs Life in the Country</i> W3: <i>Young Japanese People Who Move to Live in the Country</i>	Compare & Contrast essay: <i>Compare life in the city to life in the country</i>
Unit 2	Festivals	W1: <i>A Beginner's Guide to Summer Festivals in Japan</i> W2: <i>Guy Fawkes Night in England</i> W3: <i>Festivals of the Dead Around Asia</i>	Compare & Contrast essay: <i>Compare a Japanese festival to one from a foreign culture</i>
Unit 3	School and Education	W1: <i>Student Debt in Japan</i> W2: <i>Free education in Sweden, Part 1</i> W3: <i>Free education in Sweden, Part 2</i>	Argumentative essay: Resolution: <i>Education should be free for all citizens.</i>
Unit 4	The Internet and Technology	W1: <i>Cyberbullying Over Social Media in Japan</i> W2: <i>Impact of Cyberbullying on Teens</i> W3: <i>Three Ways Social Media Can Help People Help People</i>	Argumentative essay: Resolution: <i>The government should make a strict law to control bullying on social networks</i>

Table 2

2nd Semester	Unlock Unit	Reading News Article Topic	Writing Discourse Mode and Topic
Unit 5	Weather and Climate	W1: <i>What is Climate Change? (Part 1)</i> W2: <i>What is Climate Change? (Part 2)</i> W3: <i>The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement</i>	Cause and Effect essay: <i>Choose an aspect of climate change and identify its causes and effects</i>
Unit 6	Sports and Competition	W1: <i>The 1964 Tokyo Olympics</i> W2: <i>The social and economic effects of hosting the Olympics</i> W3: <i>The advantages of hosting the Olympics</i>	Cause and Effect essay: <i>What are the effects of hosting the Olympic Games?</i>

Unit 7	Business	<p>W1: <i>What is corporate social responsibility?</i></p> <p>W2: <i>These three companies excel at CSR</i></p> <p>W3: <i>Japanese CSR from a different perspective</i></p>	<p>Descriptive essay:</p> <p><i>Choose a socially-responsible company and describe what makes it socially responsible</i></p>
Unit 8	People	<p>W1: <i>Omura Stunned</i></p> <p>W2: <i>Man runs 401 kilometers</i></p> <p>W3: <i>Pride of Britain</i></p>	<p>Descriptive essay:</p> <p><i>Nominate and describe your "Person of the Year"</i></p>

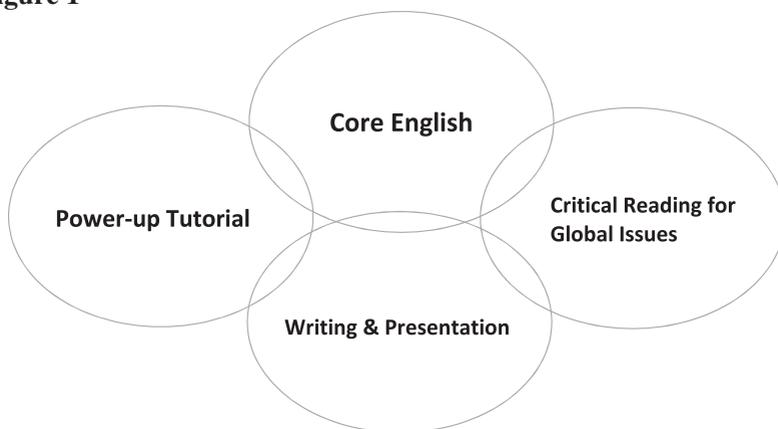
3. Integration of CELP with non-CELP Collabo English courses

Integration and coordination are two of the principles that tie the entire English curriculum together, further ensuring collaboration and cooperation amongst the teaching staff. Integration means that English classes in the curriculum are thematically and topically integrated across the CELP courses (CE and PUT) as well as the non-CELP courses Critical Reading for Global Issues (CRGI) and Writing and Presentation (WP). This is achieved by following a three week schedule all aligned as content-based topical units (See Tables 1 and 2). There are several benefits to an integrated curriculum. The main benefit is that students are able to actively and recursively use relevant vocabulary and grammar for meaningful language output activities with as many as 15 class opportunities for such output based on the same general theme or topic throughout all the English classes. (See Figure 1).

4. Collabo Core English Class Goals and Assessment

The Collabo CE course has two classes per week; CE-A which focuses on speaking and listening skills, and CE-B which focuses on reading and writing. Although each class is assessed separately, each unit is thematically the same. In the Collabo department, the entire freshman cohort consists of approximately 104 students and they are divided into six classes, A - F with about 16-18 students

Figure 1



per class. The BC provides three teachers, so each teacher is in charge of two classes that meet twice a week, for a total of four CE classes. In 2018, the CE-A classes took place on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, and the CE-B classes took place on Friday afternoons.

The listening goals and outcomes for the CE-A specify that learners will develop their listening abilities to allow them to function in an academic environment by predicting content using visuals, taking notes, using visual cues to help them listen, listening for reasons, predicting from research, listening for bias, recognizing numbers, and recognizing attitude.

The speaking class goals and outcomes for the CE-A class specify that learners will increase their academic communicative abilities in speaking to allow them to speak about an interesting place introducing facts and opinions, use suggestion phrases and answer questions, offer their opinion, agree and disagree in a debate about choosing how they learn, present a report about a device including advantages and disadvantages with supporting details, describe processes involving climate change using collocations and “so/therefore”, discuss sport and money while talking about advantages and asking for clarification, present a solution to study a problem and give advice to someone using multi-word verbs,

and describe an object using phrases to talk about its appearance and functions.

The reading class goals and outcomes for the CE-B class specify that learners will develop their reading abilities allowing them to function in an academic environment by learning how to scan for numbers, preview larger texts, skim texts for general understanding, make inferences, use their knowledge to predict content, scan to predict content, work out meaning from context, and read for detail.

The writing class goals and outcomes for the CE-B class specify that learners will develop their writing abilities to be able to write descriptive sentences about the place they live using adjectives and “there is / there are”, organize and write a descriptive paragraph about a festival using correct sentence structure, write a paragraph about their education using nouns and topic/supporting sentences, write a one-sided opinion paragraph about technology using opinion phrases and linkers, write sentences to describe a graph using the correct vocabulary and an introductory sentence, write a process paragraph to describe events in a triathlon using prepositions and ordering events, write a narrative paragraph about Google using business collocations and adding detail, and write an explanatory paragraph describing a person they admire using adjectives and a conclusion.

Both formative and summative assessment criteria is a part of the CE-A and CE-B classes. Formative assessment is typically characterized as being informal and frequent as learners progress through a course, whereas summative assessment is characterized as being more formal assessments to measure achievement at the end of a course, and both can be used as feedback for students to improve learning (Davison & Leung, 2009). Formative assessment for both classes accounts for 50% of the student grade of which 40% consists of assessing weekly homework assignments through the online workbook that is aligned with the textbook contents and class participation, while 10% of their formative assessment is from biweekly vocabulary quizzes. Summative assessment accounts for 50% of the student grade, with 25% based on midterm tests during week 7 of

the semester and 25% based on final tests in week 14 with feedback and review done in week 15.

More specifically, for the CE-A speaking and listening class, the midterm and final tests consist of a speaking test in which the students are given a discussion task based on the unit themes in groups of three to four students and they have recursive discussions while changing partners every ten minutes. The instructor moves about the room evaluating the students based on an assessment rubric focusing on interactive skills as well as vocabulary and grammar. The listening test focuses on listening and vocabulary comprehension of a recorded dialog. Regarding the CE-B reading and writing midterm and final tests, the writing assessment consists of writing a paragraph based on the unit themes, while the reading assessment consists of reading a short article based on the unit themes and answering comprehension questions.

5. Collabo Power-Up Tutorial Introduction

The Power-Up Tutorial (PUT) program in The School of Global Governance and Collaboration (Collabo) is largely based upon that delivered in The Center for Language Education and Development (CLED). Before the Collabo PUT program began in 2017, Mr. James Amrein and Mr. Dave Bowyer, PUT tutors from CLED, offered advice and help to get the Collabo PUT program started. This resulted in the Collabo PUT program originally sharing many similarities between the two programs.

Though the Collabo PUT program was modeled upon the one designed by CLED, we felt it was also important for us to create our own vision for what shape Collabo PUT could take, and its role within the wider Collabo English curriculum. The departmental ethos of collaboration encouraged us to develop Collabo PUT as a ‘shared vision’ (McCaffery, 2010), created and continually revised by listening to the voices of all the teachers on the PUT program and working together to build a program in which all members of Collabo PUT are

invested. As a result, though still maintaining similarities to the CLED PUT program, the Collabo PUT program has undergone some revisions in content, assessment, and student tracking, which will be described below.

6. Power-Up Tutorial Content and Integration

As discussed above, the vision for the Collabo English curriculum integrated ideas from communicative language teaching (CLT) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL). After some consideration it was felt that the same textbooks used in the CLED PUT program (Amrein et al., 2017a, 2017b) would be used as the core material of the classes, since they were written by NUFS teachers, for NUFS students, and they met the requirement of having a communicative focus in the outcomes.

However, since CLIL is also at the heart of the vision for the Collabo English curriculum, special attention had to be given into ways in which the topics covered in the PUT classes could be integrated into the wider topics and themes covered elsewhere in the curriculum. On occasion, the topics already included in the textbooks (Amrein et al., 2017a, 2017b) aligned with the central topics of the Collabo English program, requiring no changes to be made. When there is no alignment between the topics in the PUT text and the Collabo English curriculum, then some small changes have been made.

In principle, the changes we make are often on the fourth page of the unit in *Power-Up Dialogue*, the ‘Let’s Talk’ page. Usually this involves changing the topic of the ‘Let’s Talk’ to a topic more connected with the Collabo English curriculum. Other times, the PUT teaching staff collaborate on a brand-new activity or worksheet which replaces the ‘Let’s Talk’ page in its entirety.

7. Student Assessment in PUT

The original assessment scheme in 2017 was adapted from the advice received from Mr. Amrein and Mr. Bowyer. Collabo PUT students were graded

on two items, 'in-class effort' and 'quality of homework'. They were awarded between 0 and 2 points for each item at the end of class, which was then recorded on a simple spreadsheet at the end of each day by the PUT teachers. For each student, these grades were then totalled and converted into a percentage for the final grade.

As is now routine in Collabo, the coordinator of PUT met with the PUT teachers at the end of the 2017 academic year to reflect on the year and discuss ways in which the program could be improved. The conversation mainly focussed on assessment, and the following issues were identified for improvement:

- There was not enough variation in grades across the students at the end of each semester
- The idea of a number-based system of grading (0-2) was not as clear to PUT teachers as a letter-based system (A-D)
- There was concern among the PUT teachers that some teachers may have a different understanding of what constituted a student receiving a maximum grade (2) for effort or homework

In order to address these concerns, all members agreed upon changing to a letter-based system of grading, and the creation of a formal grading rubric to ensure more consistency across the PUT teachers in their grading. For the letter-based grading, we originally discussed using a five-grade scale (A+ to D), but teachers became concerned that the difference between an A+ and an A may be too ambiguous. Therefore, the decision was made to grade using four letter grades (A-D).

Alongside the new letter-based system, the PUT teachers and the PUT coordinator collaborated on the creation of a new grading rubric, clearly defining assessment criteria for each letter grade and for each grading item (in-class effort and homework). This process began with each teacher suggesting their

own criteria and emailing them to the coordinator, who collated the ideas and placed them unedited into a single document. Then, through face-to-face meetings and email discussions, the criteria were refined and edited until everyone felt the rubric was suitable for use in the 2018 academic year. The rubric was also written in plain English, meaning that all PUT students could be given a copy of it at the beginning of each semester, ensuring transparency in how PUT students are graded.

At the end of the 2018 academic year, we once again had a meeting to reflect on the effectiveness of these changes, and how the PUT programme could be further improved. Overall, the new letter-based grading scheme was deemed to be a success by the PUT teaching staff, who found it offered much more clarity than the old system, especially when used in conjunction with the rubric. We also saw a much more curved distribution in student grades at the end of each semester, which made all teachers more confident in the changes. There were, however, some problematic criteria which were identified in the rubric.

Through the spring vacation, the PUT teachers and coordinator have worked on rewording these problematic criteria, and adding some new criteria to further clarify each letter grade. It is our intention to once again revisit this at the end of the 2019 academic year to review how effective the new changes have been.

Conclusion

Designing and implementing an English as a foreign language (EFL) university curriculum takes into consideration a variety of principles and factors. This report has shown that a systematic and collaborative approach to curriculum design involves not only understanding how languages are acquired, but also understanding how to meet the needs of the various requirements of the university and its students. Language curriculum design and language teaching is much more than simply choosing a textbook and then asking teachers to “go teach it”, which is something that has been heard by many of us in this profession. Until

language teachers are considered professional specialists in their own right, the efforts that they make in planning, preparing, teaching and evaluating their students are likely to be underestimated. Language teaching has long evolved from being a teacher-centered, grammar-translating form-focused classroom activity. The contemporary language teacher is well-informed about the importance of creating a comfortable environment where learners are free to actively interact with each other for the purpose of meaningful communication, and that is the main goal of the CELP program in Collabo.

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