

Innovative Syllabus with Creative Activities

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In this paper, an innovative syllabus employed for a selective English course is presented along with creative activities. The syllabus is referred to as an interactive syllabus since great interactions take place among learners, teachers, and materials. The syllabus offers the list of interactive activities, and authentic materials are carefully selected and devised into attractive teaching tools to suit learners as the semester progresses. This way, current topics and issues are always dealt with in the classroom, and the course continues to be fresh and novel for years to come.

Keywords: syllabus design, innovative syllabus, interactive syllabus

Introduction

It goes without saying that the latest materials available on the internet can be precious resources for college English education. One can read, watch, and listen to the hottest world news and topics by visiting CNN, BBC, and TED websites, to name a few. Given that one of the significant goals of college education is to equip students with skills to become autonomous lifelong learners, a college course that dedicates to leading students into handling live information in English through meaningful and interactive activities is worthy of attention. Media English, a selective course offered to information and media studies majors at Nagoya Bunri University, exactly fits this description.

The major objective of the current paper is to present an innovative syllabus—an interactive syllabus where interactions take place among learners, teachers, and materials. Specifically, it is intended to 1) introduce the outline of a syllabus employed for Media English, 2) demonstrate some of the interactive activities using authentic materials that are found to be effective, and 3) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the syllabus.

Overview of Available Syllabi

Generally speaking, a syllabus describes what the course is about, what it aims to achieve, and what specifics are taught and in what order. A number of different syllabi for language learning have been arisen along with different theories and methods. As Mohseni Far (2008)¹⁾ observes, “in recent years, the focus of syllabuses has shifted away from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks.” Prior to the introduction of Krashen’s (1981)²⁾ theory on second language acquisition, methods that put a great importance on grammar, such as the Grammar-translation, Audio-lingual, and Cognitive approaches, had been dominant. Understandably, a structural syllabus, where lesson contents are organized around grammatical rules, is in concert with these approaches.

The major criticism against the earlier methods is the significant lack of learners’ communicative production. Krashen’s influential hypotheses triggered different approaches to overcome this flaw and have become the source of today’s great variation in methods and syllabi. His major ideas are summarized as follows (Lightbown and Spada 1993³⁾; Wilson⁴⁾).

Table 1. Krashen's Hypotheses (1981)

Hypotheses	Major ideas
I. The Acquisition-Learning Distinction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language acquisition is a subconscious process. Acquirers develop a “feel” for correctness. - Language learning is a conscious process. Learners know the rules of a language. - Acquisition is more important than learning. Only the acquired system is readily available for natural communication.
II. The Input Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquisition occurs with comprehensible input, which is defined as the input slightly beyond the acquirer’s level.
III. The Monitor Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The learned system acts as a monitor. Learners use it when focusing on form.
IV. The Natural Order Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a predictable order of acquiring the rules of a language.
V. The Affective Filter Hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Input is taken in most efficiently when learners/acquirers are motivated, confident, and relaxed; that is, when their affective filter or barrier is low.

Newer methods include the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, Language immersion, Suggestopedia, the Communicative Approach, and others. These methods are more focused on bringing out the communicative abilities of learners, and the activities employed in the classroom are generally more interactive. A variation in syllabi has also emerged. There may be syllabi more suitable for one method over another; however, there is no strict one-to-one relationship between methods and syllabi. Instructors pick one syllabus but incorporate various methods. The following figure demonstrates available syllabi with prominent methods in an approximate chronological frame.

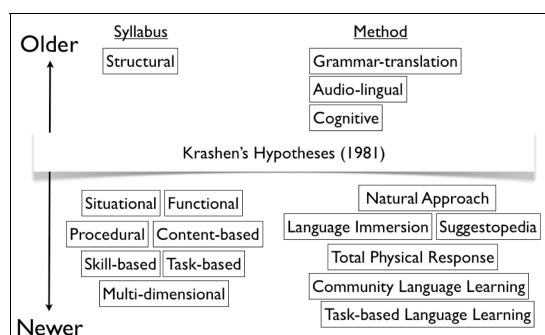


Figure 1. Available syllabi and methods

One of the newer syllabi that have been popular in the last decade or two is a task-based syllabus. The key element in this syllabus is that learners should be engaged in activities that take place in the real world,

such as taking part in a job interview, completing a credit card application, and so on (Nunan, 2001⁵⁾). The use of authentic materials is favored, and language acquisition is considered to occur through performing meaningful tasks. Another newer syllabus worth mentioning may be a multi-dimensional syllabus—a flexible syllabus, where things to be achieved vary as the class proceeds. Target items can be grammatical notions, communicative functions, cultural attitudes, or many more (McLaren and Madrid, 2004)⁶⁾. An interactive syllabus discussed in this paper incorporates some of these ideas.

Interactive Syllabus

An interactive syllabus employed for Media English aims for promoting learners’ ability to handle live English conveyed through various media—the major of which is the internet. Materials are selected mainly according to whether or not they are interesting enough to make learners want to commit to the class. A 15-week schedule handed out to learners at the beginning of the semester provides only a skeleton, and the meat is determined as the class proceeds. Some of the materials are contemporary news which may not be available at the time the class begins. Table 2 presents a blueprint for a 15-week schedule to be made public for the next academic year. As is seen in the table, each week is characterized with a main activity, which is in bold face. Actual materials are carefully selected so as to interest the majority of the learners. Most of the materials are

Table 2. A 15-week Schedule for Media English

Week 1	Introduction, Reading a newspaper article on a familiar topic I
Week 2	Reading a newspaper article on a familiar topic II , Vocabulary List 1
Week 3	Reading an online article on a biographical story , Vocabulary List 2
Week 4	Guidance on Online Extensive Reading
Week 5	Listening to a TED presentation , Vocabulary List 3
Week 6	Watching an interview with a famous person , Vocabulary List 4
Week 7	Scanning for specific information with world news , Vocabulary List 5
Week 8	Guessing a topic from two different articles , Vocabulary List 6
Week 9	Reading YouTube comments , Vocabulary List 7
Week 10	Creating advertisement words , Vocabulary List 8
Week 11	Guessing words in lyrics from context , Vocabulary List 9
Week 12	Sorting opinions: Pros, Cons, or Neutral? , Vocabulary List 10
Week 13	Constructing a story through listening , Vocabulary List 11
Week 14	Acting out a sitcom scene
Week 15	Final Project: Presentation on the news of your choice

authentic; that is, they are not modified for language learners. When they seem difficult to the learners, sufficient support to enhance comprehension is provided most often by breaking the text into manageable small pieces, having stronger students help other students, and providing multiple media to convey the news, such as audio recordings, videos, and slides with pictures. A 15-week schedule format like Table 2 may remain for a long time, but the actual materials should frequently be altered so that the course can continue to be fresh and novel. The order of activities is mainly determined by two factors—the degree of difficulty and a balance in variation. Learners should not be overwhelmed by the difficulty of authentic materials at the beginning of the semester and should not be bored or discouraged by successive occurrences of similar activities.

Interactive Activities

In this section, the procedure for each of the following three interactive activities is presented: Creating advertisement words, sorting opinions, and acting out. Table 3 below shows what the teacher and learners do for the first activity. The iPad commercial was used as a material for Media English when it was released in 2010. Nagoya Bunri University happened to be the first university in Japan to distribute iPads to students for free of charge, and thus the news was the

hottest topic and everyone's interest at the time. The learners' involvement in the activity was enormous. They only viewed the commercial but did not hear the audio until the very end of the class, which helped them grow their imagination and come up with creative advertisement words of their own. When they presented their advertisements in front of the class and were able to read them well along with the 30-second video with no audio, the rest of the class applauded. This activity was done with other commercials, such as Toyota Prius and Nintendo DSi.

Table 4 below demonstrates the procedure employed for the activity of sorting opinions. The news of President Obama being awarded Nobel Peace Prize was rather surprising and attracted people's attention at the time. All the learners in the class heard the news but had not had a chance to know what Americans thought of the news. Comments posted on Twitter are current and live voices of the nation. In order to sort the comments into three categories, they had to read them carefully. In groups of three, the learners sat together, had 21 pieces of paper on the desk, each with a comment, helped each other, and enthusiastically discussed the intentions of the commentators to achieve accurate sorting. This activity is also replicable with other controversial issues.

Table 3. The Procedure for Creating Advertisement Words

Teacher	Learners
1. Provide the first handout (Appendix A (a)) 2. Play the iPad commercial with the sound off. 5. Type the collected words. 7. Check the advertisement. 10. Provide the second handout (Appendix A (b)). 12. Collect their ideas. 13. Play the commercial with the sound on. 15. Collect their answers.	3. Write down words that they think might be used in the commercial. 4. Report words that they wrote down. 6. Create an advertisement. 8. Practice reading aloud their advertisement. 9. Stand in front next to the screen and read their advertisement with the commercial being played with the sound off. 11. Guess what words are missing in the actual commercial. 14. Fill in the blanks to complete the actual commercial.

Table 4. The Procedure for Sorting Opinions: Pros, Cons, or Neutral?

Teacher	Learners
1. Play the “Prize-winning President” video clip. 2. Provide the handout (Appendix B (a)). 4. Collect their answers. 6. Collect their answers. 7. Play the “Obama Making Comments” video clip. 8. Play the “Online Reaction to Obama Nobel” video clip and asks: “What are three types of reaction?” to elicit “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Not sure.” 9. Make groups of three and give each group the following: 1) 21 small pieces of paper, each with a twitter comment (Appendix B (b)). 2) A large sheet of paper with the column of “Agree,” the column of “Disagree,” and the column of “Not sure.” 12. Collect their sorting decisions.	3. Read the extracted paragraphs and complete the vocabulary table. 5. Answer the following content questions: 1) What was the reason for awarding President Obama the Nobel Prize? 2) How does he feel about winning the prize? 10. Place each comment under “Agree,” “Disagree,” or “Not Sure.” (group work) 11. Report their sorting decisions. 13. Report the gist of the comment that they find the most interesting in Japanese.

Table 5. The Procedure for Acting Out a Sitcom Scene

Teacher	Learners
1. Provide the handout (Appendix C (a)). 2. Play three scenes from Friends. Explain the gist of each scene before playing it. 3. Assign roles. 6. Leave an iPad to each group so that they can view the scene multiple times. 9. Play each scene again.	4. Sit together in the same scene group. 5. Work on the assigned dialogue. 7. Study intonations, gestures, and the use of props while watching the video. 8. Rehearse the scene with props (Appendix C (b)). 10. Read each scene. 11. Become teachers and answer any questions arisen about the scene they were assigned. 12. Act out the assigned scene in front of the class with the props.

Finally, the activity of acting out was conducted in the manner given in Table 5. The learners who were to play the same scene sat together and studied its script word by word, and then the pronunciation and intonation as well as the gestures and the use of props. The teacher walked around the tables and helped them comprehend their dialogue when difficulties occurred especially regarding cultural references that they were not familiar with. When they were ready to act out the scene, they were instructed to rehearse it several times. Furthermore, prior to the presentation phase, all learners were told to read all three scenes, and each learner was in charge of answering questions about his or her assigned dialogue.

The major objective of this activity is to speak colloquial English while being well aware of what they are saying, which can effectively be achieved through using props and gestures. The three scenes were chosen because they were funny and involved a great deal of props and gestures. Activities of this sort maximize interactions among learners and between learners and materials.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Interactive Syllabus

One of the strengths in the interactive syllabus outlined in this paper is its variation, as is frequently found in students' evaluation conducted at the end of the semester. They find altering contents enjoyable. They also like the fact that they improve their reading and listening skills with authentic materials. It is generally believed that authentic materials are too challenging for beginners, but their great interest in materials can sometimes overcome their weaknesses. Other comments indicate that they have no choice but to be engaged in using English. Materials can be very exciting, which promotes learners' commitment to class activities. Furthermore, learners of different levels can be in the same class and can both have some gains. Even the strongest students learn something new from authentic materials. Less competent students receive support from more competent students through pair or group works. In creation activities, such as the one introduced in Table 3, there are no high or low limits in the quality of their works; they simply need to handle the task with their best knowledge.

One of the drawbacks is rather an excessive burden on teachers. In order to provide current interesting materials, lesson plans should be refreshed quite frequently. Furthermore, it is at times quite laborious to find a piece of news suitable for learners from unlimited resources. Once it is chosen, it takes time and thought to make it into an effective teaching tool, often involving searching for relevant videos and audio recordings. Another drawback may be the fact that activities are often the most effective when the class is small. Interactive activities involve many presentations, and individual support and feedbacks are quite necessary. Media English has typically been a small class of 10 to 12 students, and the syllabus has been successful. If it is adopted for a larger class, various adjustments might be needed, such as group presentations and collective feedbacks.

Concluding Remark

In this paper, an interactive syllabus employed for Media English has been presented. It is a syllabus that describes a variety of interactive activities waiting to be filled with interesting authentic materials. In conducting a class, various teaching techniques and methods are incorporated to suit an individual activity. The overall growth of reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities is targeted. Furthermore, it aims to equip learners with skills that enable them to handle live materials and help them become autonomous lifelong learners. Teachers who use this syllabus are expected to display an extraordinary amount of commitment to creating activities, which is seemingly a drawback. However, it is a truth that this commitment makes all the difference.


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Appendix A
 Creating advertisement words
 (text source: www.youtube.com)
 a. The first handout

iPad: Commercial




I. Watch the commercial of iPad with the sound off. What words do you think are being used? Make predictions. 

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs
iPad revolution	begin	only	already just

II. Write an advertisement based on your predictions above. The first and last lines are given.
 Remember that the commercial lasts only 30 seconds! 

What is iPad?

It's already a revolution, and it's only just begun.

III. Check your advertisement with the instructor and then read it aloud several times until you can fluently say it. Present it to the class along with the movie clip with the sound off. 

b. The second handout

IV. Now watch the commercial with the sound on and find the missing words.

What is iPad?

iPad is (),

iPad is (),

iPad goes (),

and lasts () day,

there's no () way,

or () way,

it's () powerful,

it's magical,

you already know how to () it,

it's () apps and counting,

all the world's websites in your (),

it's video, photos,

more () than you could read in a lifetime,

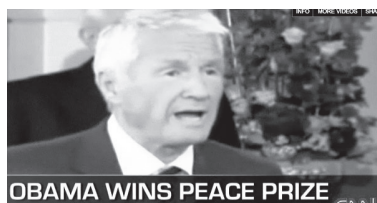
it's already a revolution, and it's only just begun.

Appendix B
 Sorting Opinions: Pros, Cons, or Neutral?
 a. The handout

Work in groups. Take turns and read paragraphs aloud. Ask one another questions to make sure your comprehension is correct. Then, complete the table below without a dictionary.

English	Japanese	English	Japanese
1.	外交	6.	達成
2.	核兵器拡散	7.	軍備縮小（撤廃）
3.	締め切り	8.	～に値する
4.	憶測	9.	人物、名士
5.	驚きの声	10.	勇敢な

President Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize



OSLO (AP) -- President Barack Obama won the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for "his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples," the Norwegian Nobel Committee said, citing his outreach to the Muslim world and attempts to curb nuclear proliferation.

The stunning choice made Obama the third sitting U.S. president to win the Nobel Peace Prize and shocked Nobel observers because Obama took office less than two weeks before the Feb. 1 nomination deadline. Obama's name had been mentioned in speculation before the award but many Nobel watchers believed it was too early to award the president.

During the press conference to announce the winner, there were gasps in the room when Obama's name was mentioned in Norwegian. Moments later, the announcement was made again but in English.

Rather than recognizing concrete achievement, the 2009 prize appeared intended to support initiatives that have yet to bear fruit: reducing the world stock of nuclear arms, easing American conflicts with Muslim nations and strengthening the U.S. role in combating climate change.

"Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," Thorbjørn Jagland, chairman of the Nobel Committee said. "In the past year Obama has been a key person for important initiatives in the U.N. for nuclear disarmament and to set a completely new agenda for the Muslim world and East-West relations."

(<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/09/president-barack-obama-wins-nobel-peace-prize/>)

"To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who've been honored by this prize -- men and women who have inspired me and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace," he said.



And yet, he said: "I know that throughout history the Nobel Peace Prize has not just been used to honor specific achievement. It's also been used as a means to give momentum to a set of causes."

(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/09/AR2009100900914.html>)

b. Twitter comments
(text source: twitter.com)

1. Americans seem to be on a roll with the Nobel Committee this year with lots of winners. Congratulations to President Obama. It's nice to see that the world believes in our President as much as we do!	2. Surprising...don't know if it's a perfect choice or if it's too soon, but it's definitely something unexpected.
3. It's ridiculous and makes this Nobel Committee look like they just want media attention. Obama has done nothing to earn it so far.	4. They should institute a Nobel Prize for driving conservatives crazy.
5. I am always proud of America when one of our citizen's wins any prize regardless of my personal political views.	6. Barack Obama wins the Nobel Prize for making promises. If he has any honor, he'll refuse it. #giveitback
7. He deserves it. People the WORLD over were given hope to believe in change, in themselves and the future with his election.	8. I think Bill or Hillary Clinton would have been a better pick, they both have work longer and harder for the Nobel Peace Prize, think about it.
9. Barack Obama Wins Nobel Peace Prize in 2009...I can see the rationale, but it is VERY early to cast judgment on the man's body of work.	10. Look out, Obama: The Nobel is a ticket to one's own funeral. No one has ever done anything after he got it.
11. I'm starting my own poll: Which is more of a joke? Jeiter winning the Gold Glove or Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize?	12. Choosing president Obama as Nobel peace winner turned to make him unable to take tough decisions about important international issues.
13. Barack Obama getting the Nobel Peace Prize is a good thing.	14. this obama guy getting a nobel peace prize for doing nothing but get elected?..?
18. I am appalled that Obama was even nominated, let alone selected. He has insightful unrest in the USA. There is NO PEACE under his watch.	
17. No President Obama does not deserve the Nobel Peace Prize he hasn't done anything to deserve it this is simply a slap at the Bush Administration. I wish they'd get on with what has to be done to keep us safe, and stop all this foolishness.	16. What an honor! And what a way to put our country back in the good graces of the rest of the world! Winning the Nobel Peace prize for his efforts at encouraging peace through international diplomacy...what a concept!
15. I think most people are unaware of the considerable amount of work President Obama did before being elected. Personally, I believe his work to rid the world of nukes and doing more than any other prez on climate change is enough to deserve the award. When you browse a list of previous winners, all but a few are debatable.	20. I think the reward was premature at best, a mistake at worst. I like Obama's rhetoric, and I like some of the steps he's taken in the last 10 months, but so far I'm not seeing anything that's been so outstanding as to produce the seemingly miracle results an award such as the Nobel Peace Prize would imply there has been.
21. Well, he may or may not deserve it, but he did nothing to seek getting it. And you gotta admit he is doing things that no other President has tried and has high goals in seeking peace in the middle east. And he sincerely means what he says in regards to that issue! So, what the heck, give it to him, if for no other reason than to make him stand out to other countries which will make them see this is a new era in which peace is more important than war, and discrimination! Who knows? Maybe this will influence other nations to be more cooperative with him!	19. I'm split, I don't know if his efforts so far deserve the Nobel. If nothing else, he should split it with GWBush and the Republicans; without their legacy, he would never have appeared so good, so even-handed. Seriously, I'm not making a snide comment, if there hadn't been the last eight years of turmoil, the Committee would have never thought to give Obama the medal.

Appendix C

Acting Out a Sitcom Scene

(text source: www.livesinabox.com/friends/scripts.shtml)

a. The handout

I. Watch the following three scenes from the American TV comedy show *Friends*. Grasp the conversations and pay special attention to the gestures and props.

[1]

Prop: pipe



Joey: (whispering) Ross!
 Ross: What?
 Joey: Come here, check this out!
 Ross: What? Is it the comet? (Runs over to where Joey's standing.)
 Joey: No! No-no. Look, there's a bug stuck in tar right here. (Bends down to get a closer look.)
 Ross: Joey come? I can't believe? I bring you here to see the Bapstein-King comet, one of nature's most spectacular phenomenon, and all you care about are bugs stuck in tar and-and some woman!
 Joey: (standing up) Y'know, there's two women dude.
 Ross: Show me where?
 Joey: Right-right up here. (Starts looking at them through a piece of pipe.)
 Ross: (noticing the pipe and looking at the door) Joey where's the pipe that was holding the door open?
 Joey: (annoyed) I don't know! (Goes back to looking through the pipe.) (Pause) Yeah, I do.
 Ross: Joey!
 Joey: What?! All right? Hey! Don't look at me! You're the one who wanted to come up and look for some stupid Burger King comet!
 Ross: It's called the Bapstein-King comet, okay? (Joey starts to groan.) Hey! Hey! Bapstein was a very well respected astronomer!
 Joey: (covering his ears and yelling) Oh no! No! No! (He starts banging on the door.)

[2]

Props: phone, newspaper, pot & lid, flowers

[Scene: Monica and Rachel's apartment. Rachel is on the phone.]

Rachel: Mom, would you relax. That was 10 blocks from here and, the, the woman was walking alone at night, I would never do that. Mom, c'mon, stop worrying. This is a safe street, this is a safe building, there's nothing [a pigeon flies in the window and lands on the table] OH MY GOOD, oh my God, oh I gotta go, I gotta go, I gotta go. [hangs up] OK, that's fine, you just read the paper, I'm gonna get a pot, it's not for you. [grabs a pot and lid] OK, that's fine, read the Family Circus, enjoy the gentle comedy. [puts pot over the pigeon] Aaahh, oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, aaaaahh. [knock at the door] It's open you guys.

[a stranger enters with flowers]

Stranger: Hi.
 Rachel: Hi, hi can I help you?
 Stranger: Yeah, I'm looking for Phoebe, does she still live here?
 Rachel: Uh, no she doesn't but I can, I can get a message to her.
 Stranger: Great. Uhh, just tell her her husband stopped by. [leaves flowers on bar]
 Rachel: What? [in surprise she forgets she has the pigeon in the pot and lets it get away]
 Stranger: Hey, how, how did you do that?



[3]

Props: computer monitor, wallet, purse, credit cards, a twenty-dollar bill

[Scene: An airport in New York.]



Rachel: (Running to the ticket counter) Ooh, ooh, ooh,ooh,ooh. (Slightly out of breath) Hi.

Ticket Agent: (Cheerfully.) Hello.

Rachel: (Faking cheerfulness.) Hello. Umm, when is your next flight to London?

Ticket Agent: (looking at her **computer terminal**) There's one leaving in thirty minutes.

Rachel: Ohh, good.

Ticket Agent: And I do have one seat left.

Rachel: Ohh, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Ticket Agent: The last minute fare on this ticket is twenty seven hundred dollars.

Rachel: (looking through her **wallet**.) Ohh, I just don't think I have enough left on my credit card.

Ticket Agent: Well you can split it with another credit card.

Rachel: Ohh, okay, how about five. (She hands her **all the credit cards**.) Ohh, thank you.

Ticket Agent: I'm just going to need to see your passport.

Rachel: (Looking through her **purse**.) Okay, you know what? I don't have it, but I can tell you exactly where it is on my night stand, and...okay. But you know what? I have my driver's license and I have a **twenty**. (She slides it across the counter.)

Ticket Agent: (Slides the **twenty** back and tosses her **credit cards** onto the counter.)

II. Now, play the assigned role with appropriate gestures and props!

b. The props

