**Lesson One: Designing a Syllabus or a Course Component**

**Session Three: The Completion of the First Lesson**

**2.4. Selecting and Developing Activities and Materials**

How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? What is my students’ role?

For many teachers, course development starts with determining objectives and conceptualizing content, while they are teaching they think about materials they will use, activities their students will do, techniques they will employ. They think about the way they want their students to learn and their role in the classroom. For other teachers, materials they use form the backbone of the course. It is something concrete that the students’ use, and it provides a focus for the class. Choosing materials may mean developing new materials when teaching a course, when there is no suitable material, collecting a variety of materials, or adapting the existing materials.

There are lot of factors that should be considered while developing, choosing, or adapting materials. One of the important things to consider is their effectiveness in achieving the purpose of the course and their appropriateness for students and teachers. Appropriateness includes students confort and familiarity with the material, language level, interest, and relevance. Some teachers incorporate instructions in how to use unfamiliar materials as a part of their course design. Feasibility and availability are also important to consider.

Developing materials for using them requires time and clear sense of why they will be used, how, and by whom. Because of the lack of time, teachers are often constrained or prefer to adopt existing materials.

Experienced teachers often develop a set of core materials and activities that they adapt each time to teach a course. The materials themselves are flexible and can be used in a number of ways depending on the target skills or competencies. For example, a newspaper article can be used as a basis for developing reading skills, expanding vocabulary, or discussing culture. Pictures can be used as a focus for learning grammar or as a starting point for writing assignments. Core activities are related to the way the teacher conceptualizes the content. For some teachers, materials and activities are integrated into a method such as the language experience approach. The emphasis on proficiency and learning language in context has led many to use as authentic materials as possible in their classes. For content-based courses content materials are the foundation.

For teachers who are required to use certain texts, course development is the adaptation of the text for the content of the text to determine the content of the course. However, the text is not the course, what teacher and students do with the course constitutes the course. Textbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course. The materials in a textbook can be modified to incorporate activities that will motivate students and move them beyond the constraints of the text.

The question encompasses a teacher’s approach and how he/she views his/her role and that of the learner, how much initiative will the student be expected to take, and toward what end? How will the students be asked to interact? The emphasis on learners’ awareness and concern for extending learning beyond the classroom have made the role of the learner a central focus of the course is taught. Teachers design courses with activities and materials that have the students to take a more active role in reflecting their learning, determining the content of the course, choosing projects of interest to them. Such as approach may facilitate the search for materials in that the emphasis is not on the materials themselves but on what the students do with them.

**2.5. Organization of Content and Activities**

How will I organize the content and activities? What systems will I develop?

A part of course development is figuring out systems of organization of the course. Systems that focus on on the lesson level (the organization of each lesson) and on the course level ( the overall organization of the course). There are some specific consideration of the overall organization of the course.

Two general, complementary principles of sequencing or building and recycling the course. In deciding how to sequence materials, one considers building from simple to complex, and from more concrete to more open ended. So that activity A prepares students to unit or activity B. Building from simple to complex in a writing course may mean learning how to write narrative prose before writing an argumentative paper. Building from more concrete to open ended in a writing couse may mean that students first unscramble and discuss a sample paragraph before writing their own paragraph. In an introductory language course, it may mean talking about a family in a textbook picture using prescribed vocabulary before talking about one’s own family.

Conceiving activities as a building block puts them in a ‘feeding relation where one activity feeds into another’, if it provides something that is needed for the second one. For example, in a reading unit, students predict the content from a picture or headings that accompany the text before actually reading the text. Prior to a restaurant role-playing activity, students learn menu items and the language for ordering food.

The principle of recycling materials means that students encounter previous material in new ways, in a new skill area in a different type of activity or with a new focus. For example, a material encountered in a listening activity may be recycled in a writing exercise. A material encountered in an individual reading activity may be recycled in an activity about one’ s culture. This approach to recycling material assumes that each new encounter with the material provides a challenge to students, thereby maintaining their interest and motivation. Recycling has the effect of integrating a material and thus augment students’ ability to use or understand it.

Two complementary ways to approach the overall organization of the course: as a cycle or as a matrix. Both approaches suggest a course of material to be learned and activities to be conducted with a given time frame. In the cyclical approach, a regular cycle of activities follows a consistant sequence. For an advanced listening course, a teacher divides each session for three parts: the first one for discussion, the second for students’ presentation, and the third for watching and discussing a video. For writing, the teacher can follow a cycle of activities that reflect the steps of writing process.

In matrix approach, the teacher works with a set of possible activities for a given time frame, as the course progresses, he/she decides which activities to work with. Deciding which material or activity to be used depends on students’ interest and availability of the material.

The cycle and the matrix are not mutually exclusive, many teachers use elements of both. Certain features of the course may be predictable, augmented by other elements drawn from matrix, depending on the situation. Teachers who work with a fixed syllabus, such as that of a textbook may follow a cycle in the way they work with the material. Adapting materials often means approaching it as a matrix from which to select, depending on one’s students. Many teachers also set up daily or weekly rituals. For example, some teachers begin each session with a warm up or a review. Some teachers begin each week with a student presentation or end each week with an oral feedback session. All these methods or organizations permit a teacher to give a shape to the course.

**2.6. Evaluation**

How will I assess what students have learned? How will I assess the effectiveness of the course?

For most teachers, evaluation means evaluation within the course: assessing students proficiency, progress, or achievement. How proficient are they in listening? Are students improving their writing skill? Have they learned to function in English in the workplace? Teachers build in some form of student evaluation when developing a course, ranging from tests to informal assessments. There are four processes of evaluation: to measure proficiency, to diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses, to place students in a course or a program. The same test may be used for more than one purpose. For example, TOEFL is a test used by graduates in the United States as a proficiency test, but it is sometimes used as an achievement test if students show a gain on a TOEFL posttest. An oral entrance interview for placement purposes may also be used as an exit interview for purposes of assessing achievements. However tests are not the only means teachers have to assess their students. Teachers can structure their classroom activities so that they can assess their students’ while they are participating. They may use a portfolio approach in which students put together a portfolio of their work. They may involve their students in deciding what should be assessed and how.

Evaluation of course development also includes evaluation of the course itself, was the course effective? In what ways?

Such evaluation may not be directly linked to assessment of students’ progress, although students evaluation and test results can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the course. If students do well on tests or are judged to have made a progress, the course has been effective. But if students do not have a progress or do not demonstrate certain level of achievement, the effectiveness of the course may be questioned. Finding where the fault lies would be one of the purposes of course evaluation and could involve having students suggest why they did not make the progress predicted.

Why does one evaluate?

A course is evaluated to promote and improve its effectiveness. This may be an internal matter, when the teacher is interested with developing the best course possible. The evaluation is done for the benefit of both the teacher and the student. A course can be evaluated to provide documentation for policy reasons. In this case, evaluation is an external matter, the teacher can be required to use certain methods of evaluation or to document the effectiveness of the course in a manner prescribed by an outside party.

What can be evaluated?

Any part of the course development can be evaluated, including the assumption about and analysis of students’ needs or backgrounds, goals and objectives, materials and activities, means of assessing students’ progress, students’ participation, students’ roles and the teachers’ roles. So, each element of the framework is a subject of evaluation. For example, was the need assessment effective? Did I seek the right input? Did it enable me to make the right decision about the course? If not, why? Were goals and objectives appropriate and achievable? Did students find the materials appropriately challenging?Were activities appropriate? Did all the students participate easily? Did I find the appropriate way to evaluate students’ progress? Did the tests test what had been learned?

When does one evaluate?

In curriculum design, a distinction is usually made between formative evaluation which takes place during the development and implementation of the curriculum for purposes of modifying it as it is being developed, and summative evaluation which takes place after the curriculum has been implemented for evaluating its success and improving it for future implementation. A teacher who is involved in each stage of the course design can think of evaluation as ongoing part of the entire process. Evaluation can occur in planning and teaching stages of the course, after it is over, and when it is re-planned and taught.

Who evaluates?

At a course level, the teacher and the students are the principle evaluators. However, administrators, funders, parents, and clients may have a role in evaluation, and their role may influence the shape and existence of the course.

How does one evaluate?

A variety of ways are available. A teacher’s important means is close observation of what students do in class and how they do it? If students have difficulty performing certain tasks, one might be wise to question the appropriateness of the objectives or the activities. Informal chat with students can often provide as much information as responses to formal questionnaires. Teachers can also provide time for students to give written or oral input regarding specific aspects of the course. For example, some teachers hold regular oral feedback sessions with their students, and others have students write in journals. The teacher’s own reflection and self questioning play an important role in evaluation.

**2.7. Consideration of Resources and Constraints**

What are the givens of a given situation?

Resources and constraints are two ways of looking at the same thing. A required coursebook may be a constraint for one teacher and a resource for another. A class of fewer than 10 students may be a resource for one teacher and a constraint for another. Though these givens may seem secondary to the process just described, they play a primary role in the development of a course book because it is in considering the givens a teacher begins to make sense of the process such as needs assessment and material selection. This is what is called problematizing: defining the challenges of one´ situation so that one can make decision about what to do. In the absence of problematizing, a teacher may seek to graft the solutions appropriate to another unique situation into his/her situation. In class of an EFL teacher, a teacher who faced an extraordinary challenge, designing a conversation class for 140 students in a small space. He/she felt that having examples of needs analysis questionnaire would be a key for developing the course. Such teacher wants to seek answers from outside without first specifying the challenge for his/her situation. This problematizing would result in the examination of how others approached needs analysis as an aid in developing this teacher´s course

Here is a sketch of one way of problematizing this teacher´s situation:

- This is a conversational class but there are 140 students in space that fits 70. The teacher needs to look at ways for working within the constraints of the classroom such as ways to group or rotate students.

- What kind of conversation can 140 students possibly have? I need to assess their language ability (at what level can they carry on conversation?), and find out their backgrounds and interests (what can they have conversation about?) How will I do that? What kind of questions should I ask them? If the assessment shows that their ability is low, I need to focus on the kind of the preparation and foundation work necessary for conversation to take place.

- How can I get them together to have these conversations? Classroom management activities as a means for classroom management. Or perhaps I would ask other teachers what has worked for them in this situation.

- How can I monitor their activity? I need to examine my role in the classroom. I also need to think about the types of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms I will use in the class.

- What I worked in the past? I need to think about the activities or classes in which I felt that things went well. Why did they go well? What can I take from those successes and build into this course?

These are some proposed questions. May be another teacher may ask different questions or respond to the same ones in a different way because of the intimate challenges of his/her context and his/her role in it. For example, how students are graded, whether there is a required text, and attendance patterns would all influence the kinds of questions he/she would ask. Experience is needed because teachers carry their experience over from one context to the next, and being able to understand what has been successful and why can provide a foundation for planning a course. In context under discussion, the teacher has already taught the course and could be realistic in the expectations about what could hope to accomplish with this group of students.

The constraints and resources of one´s situation take many forms, some are tangible others not. Teachers work with or without physical and material sources such as : books, technology, a classroom, furniture,etc. The lack of physical resources may encourage a teacher to use available sources in a creative way. The availability of technology may allow a teacher to have a group of students work independently. Time is also an important consideration in designing a course. How often, how long, and over what period of time will the class meet? How much time is available to the teacher to prepare for the course and class? A teacher may adjust his/her teaching priorities according to the length of the course. The kinds of activities and the design may be affected by the institution philosophy, policy, or curriculum which are important givens. Having to work within curricular guidelines is both constraint and a resource. The type of administrative and clerical support provided by the institution affects the teachers’ choices. For example, lack of clerical support will suggest streamlining paperwork and materials. Support from the administration will encourage experimentation.

The numbers, levels, and cultural background of students are both a constraint and a resource. For example, a large class may cause a teacher to focus on classroom management. A multi level class may influence the teacher’ s selection of appropriate material and activities.

The teacher is the most appropriate given. The teacher’s background, experience, beliefs play a significant role in the choices he/he makes.

The givens of a situation cover a broad range of factors and effect every decision a teacher makes. Teachers plan and teach courses in the abstract but in the concrete of his/her own resources. For instance, an ESL teacher who teaches an intensive English program, whose students change from one group to another may need to investigate the background and proficiency of students, whereas for a school EFL teacher, this may be a given because he/she knows the students. The teacher in the intensive English course may begin with questions such as how can I find out the cultural background and needs for my students so that I can address those needs effectively in the six weeks of a course? The high school teachers’ initial question might be a quiet different how can I keep my students motivated in a required course? Course development like teaching is not neatly organized process but a complex one in which teachers are constantly considering multiple factors and proceeding on many fronts.

**Conclusion**

The framework already discussed should be considered as a set of tools for building about, understanding, and directing the process of course development. Each component is contingent on every other component. Assessment depends on how one conceptualizes content or on how one interprets students’ needs. Conceptualizing content in turn influences the course goals and objectives. Whenever one starts in the process, each component will come into the play. Each component is one way of walking with the whole.