研究ノート

Exploring Collaborative Media Projects as Assessment Tools within a Task-based EFL Curriculum at Junior College

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キンセラ　バリース．短期大学でのタスクベースのEFLカリキュラムにおける評価ツールとしての協同，メディアプロジェクトの探求．*Studies in International Relations* Vol.37, No.2. February 2017. pp.89-100.

　本論文は，短大でのEFLのカリキュラム改革に関する2部構成のシリーズのパート2です。パート1は37巻No.1に掲載されました。効果的なEFLのカリキュラム改革への最適な道筋として，タスクベースとプロジェクトベースのインストラクションの組み合わせを提唱しました。このシリーズのパート2では3年間の実施手順の提案として，実用的なプロジェクトベースのアセスメントを提供しています。そのねらいとしては2つあり，ひとつは以下の4つの点での成果が向上することを期待できるようなコースを提供し，教育的アプローチと実用的な導入で学生をサポートするための始動テンプレートを示すことです。
　　　・独立した思考と学習
　　　・生涯学習として続けられる程のやる気を起こす
　　　・英語でのコミュニケーション能力
　　　・社会的かつグローバルな関与
　これらのコースは形成的評価ツールとしての協同メディアプロジェクトに大きく依存しています。
　次いで，もうひとつのねらいとしては一般的な短大がそうであるように2年間で完了できるプログラムに適した実施手順を想定することです。

Introduction

　Almost 10 years ago, MEXT and university administrators saw the need to respond to the increasing societal demands for independent thinkers, leaders, and effective communicators. As professor Takamura (2016) pointed out there is no going back and from this moment both MEXT and university leadership expectations will snowball. Now is the time for change. To stay ahead of rushed, possibly contra-indicative and uncoordinated efforts, English departments need to band together to take the long view. There is a real need for a strategy that allows for intervention, internal and external evaluation and plans for correction.

　Making task-based instruction the guiding principle of the new curriculum is one of the most versatile options that allows for the inclusion of the above. Task-based as described by Nunan referring to Willis equals "a classroom undertaking where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative goal in order to achieve an outcome" (2006). In this sense activities or tasks are what learners need to DO to achieve learning outcomes specified for assessment. There is a sizeable community of educators in Japan already involved in implementation and evaluation of TBI at various levels of education. In fact, many of them network and support each other through collaborative projects, conferences, and workshops. It could greatly benefit junior college English departments to reach out to these educators and expand their pool of consulting experts. It bears repeating that task-based curricula neither come pre-made nor can they be thoughtlessly copied. Rather it requires local teachers and department heads, experts on their own student bodies and resources, to create

and refine a working solution. This can be daunting. However, self-education options and peer support is available.

A template for a new English curriculum at junior college

Current university guidelines expect that English learner competency be matched to the CEFR-based assessment systems, which means that desired learning outcomes in EFL courses will be informed by the European Framework. For junior college this means their English courses attempt to take them from A1 to B1 competency level. Setting effective learning outcomes then becomes the first task in coordinating a unilateral English curriculum. The second is providing structured opportunities to apply learned functions to authentic, communicative challenges in a safe environment. Third, assessment guidelines must be clear and cover only skills and language presented during instruction.

Throughout the two-year program, communicative English courses are to be connected, scaffolded and rounded off with collaborative projects. Instructional methods should be project-based (PBI). Taking cues from both Thomas (2000) and educators on fluentu.com, project-based learning can be characterized by the following: exposure to an engaging topic, a question or problem that can only be answered through research, autonomy paired with teacher guidance, clearly laid out steps, self-reflection and outcomes relevant to the real world. As class demographics unavoidably show variation in student English abilities, PBI's inclusive learning makes for a more adaptable and tailor-made curriculum. PBI allows students of different skill levels to learn together while moving at their own pace and applying their strengths to a common goal. Ducker (2012) suggests that initially inserting a mixed TBI approach into the existing curriculum offers the course of least resistance. In other words, student resistance to learner-centred courses can be mitigated by starting out slow and building towards autonomy. Looking more closely at course content and instruction, the following structural approach presents itself (see figure 1).
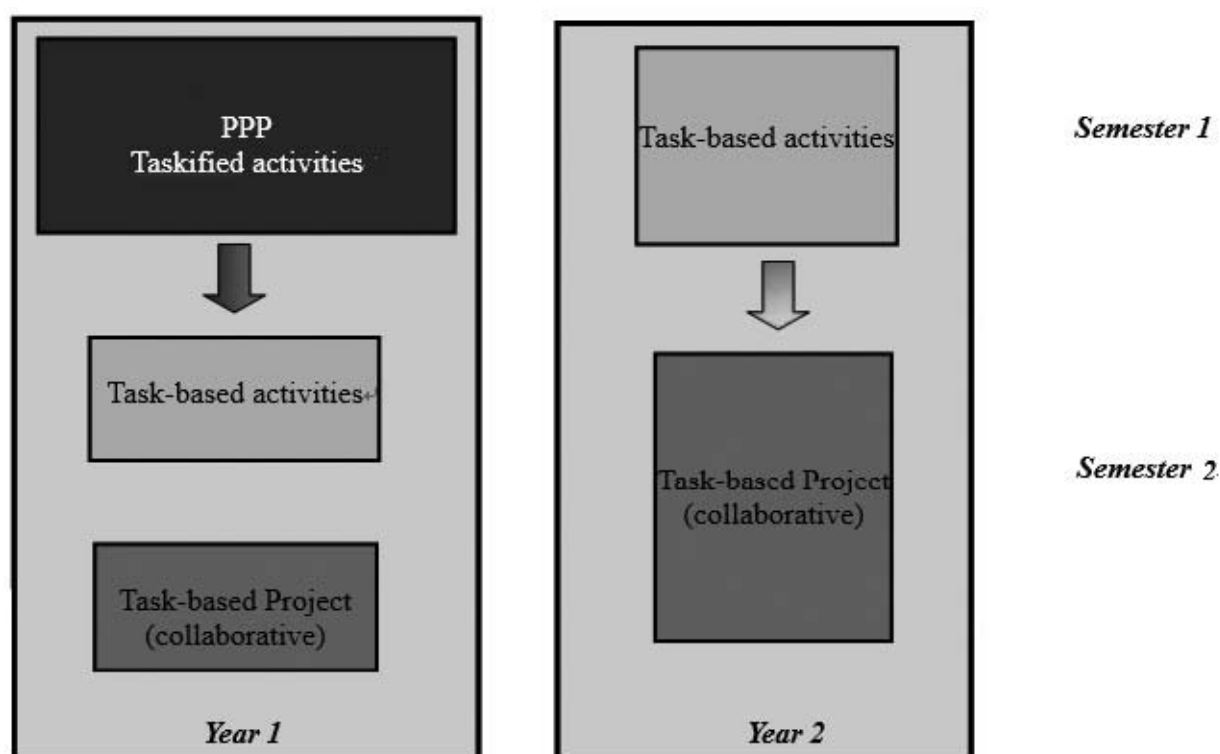

Figure 1: Flow chart first-year and second-year TB and PB English course structures

Textbooks will continue to be used during the first year. In semester one of the first year the courses feature teacher centered, PPP combined with taskified activities. To ensure equal input and fair assessment of final projects, it's recommended that parallel courses use the same course books. For instance, all English level 1 students should be using the same text. Unfortunately, most MEXT-approved texts have too many limitations vis-a-vis TBI and multi-level teaching (Humphries, 2013). Textbooks are to be agreed upon in advance and maintained for the whole implementation track to ensure that evaluative results are valid. The following criteria may help with textbook selection:

- Prevalence of task-based activities
- Ease of taskification.
- Thematic variety
- Global perspectives
- Appropriate, communicative language functions

The second half of the year will center around step-by-step, guided preparation for an end of semester project. Preparation is completed in class for the most part with the understanding that truancy affects team mates. It should consist of task-based activities that function as models for the final project. An example of such a project is the "Be Our Guest"-project (Valies, 2016) during which a Japanese, working professional was invited to present in English. As a framework for this event, students collaborated on a challenging project that required the use of all four communicative skills. The preparation/input stage moved from guided to independent and ended in group decision-making, individual output and self-reflection. Guided input and language scaffolding led to the creation of group questions to be asked during an all English guest lecture. The collaborative aspect was not limited to the preparatory phase but returned during the autonomous gathering of input data for individual written reports.

It was the first time students had been asked to work on a language activity with a longer time frame, i.e. a project. Many were terrified. Students filled out a survey before and after completing taskified, semi-collaborative activities. The post-talk survey results reveal that students felt slightly more confident in their ability to meet a language challenge. Students identified self-improvement goals and felt positive that they could someday achieve fluency. The feedback on task completion was positive with student comments describing a positive outlook on future projects (See figure 2). The new two-year task-based curriculum can easily accommodate two such projects, a midterm and final project.

Post-talk self-assessment: confidence statements	Agree	Agree a little	Don't agree
1. The speaker understood me.	13	15	3
2. I was able to ask questions loudly and clearly.	12	16	3
3. I was able to ask questions without using Japanese.	15	15	1
4. I was able to explain my question.	11	16	4
5. I was able to ask questions without looking at my paper.	11	12	8
6. I can listen for main points.	10	16	5
7. I can listen for keywords.	9	19	3

Figure 2: Post-talk self-assessment results.

On the other hand, the few who did not end up with a positive outlook included students who elected to be absent for the duration of the project, about two to three lessons. According to Horwitz et al., Communication Apprehension, Test and Negative Evaluation Anxiety are common types of anxiety that affect motivation in the EFL classroom (1986). In the case of the "Be Our Guest"-project classmates confirmed that certain students suffered from severe performance anxiety and chose to take their chances when it comes to their final grade. The fact that midterm project made up a large part of their final grade made matters worse. It can be concluded that though above survey results indicate only a slight negative response, anxiety in the inclusive classroom should not be ignored. The curriculum must provide pre-project support to boost confidence. It is important that anxious students are not made to feel alone and they can count on sufficient guidance to prevent truancy.

Alternate activities and outcomes were tested in the second semester of 2016-2017. Students were asked to make video summaries and upload them to a class padlet. This more creative form of expression encouraged learners towards independent work without the supervision of a teacher. They were given the chance to explore their padlet wall which was set up with tasks and handouts, as well as links to instructional or example videos. Learners made showcased their understanding of and opinion on a topic. Putting all assignments online and using a private site for showcasing meant more student freedom and autonomy. Firstly, they could start the project at their own pace on their devices and even co-author from different locations. Even though most of the activities were done in class, those who missed class could still view the whole assignment and participate at the next stage. Handing in work by the deadline also got easier as both teachers and students can check and upload assignments instantly.

These alternative ways of learning and producing language can be scary to first year students. By the second year, one might fear that their overall positivity will fade under the pressure of grades and graduation. Surprisingly, the desire for alternative learning tools and methods, autonomous self-study skills and motivation remain important even at later stages in life. A survey among adults and elderly life-long learners (ages 40-70) at VOIS NPO hints at the strong possibility that even after 26 to 30 years of studying English, motivation endures, real world language learning goals and communication with L2 speakers remain essential (see appendix E). 72% of these adult learners use technology to study autonomously. PCs and tablets are ranked as the top two devices. It could be concluded that it is highly relevant to teach junior college students these tools and skills now rather than later. Ultimately a graduation final project should include communication with L2 or native speakers outside the classroom. Online platforms, such as Skype are good examples of tools that help students meet language learning outcome in authentic and real time, communicative situations.

Assessment is an important part of designing a task-based/project-based curriculum. Unlike testing, it is meant to help students discover and improve on their weaker skills during the course. To meet this goal students must be assessed throughout the whole program (see figure 3). On the one hand, in-class assessment can provide *continuous* feedback, featuring self-, peer and teacher review. Rolin-Ianziti (2015) confirms that evaluation of final projects (necessarily output tasks) should always be both peer and teacher evaluated. On the other, intermittent assessment can be used to assign grades by the adoption of self-regulated language portfolios, online listening-and- speaking practice and a collaborative media project. There is one major caveat. Many students are locked into an all-or-nothing thinking when it comes to English, since set grades are required for continued studies. Formative assessment as a way to improve oneself is usually ignored or misunderstood as a waste of time since it may not produce (high) grades. Positive reinforcement of the idea that the overall balance of effort yields best results could counteract the all-or-nothing thinking that has many good students giving up mid-semester. In the first year, the introduction of daily, teacher-centered evaluations of participation

and attitude may help students understand that constancy and learning from your mistakes leads to improvement. Formative testing cannot eradicate cramming, but should allow students to identify their strong points and keep them trying; "Today was so-so, tomorrow will better."

The flexibility of PBI allows contents of projects, topic and medium to vary per teacher without compromising fairness in grading. This aspect lets teachers stay flexible in their ability to aid students and adjust instruction as well as preparatory assignments. The evaluation criteria based on effective learning outcomes are the same for all students and are best decided upon by committee. The senior project offers a great opportunity to involve students' L1 identity. Topics can relate to Japanese society and its results will preferably have real-life applicability. Positive feedback from primary students using English to talk about local traditions are encouraging (Kadota, 2015). Looking ahead to the Olympics in 2020, junior college students should be made aware of and be able to share their appreciation of local culture with visitors. In short, students who consider communication their weak point can train themselves through a final project that challenges their ability to explain something in their own words. Most importantly the final project should require students to obtain input from real live, non-Japanese speakers of English.
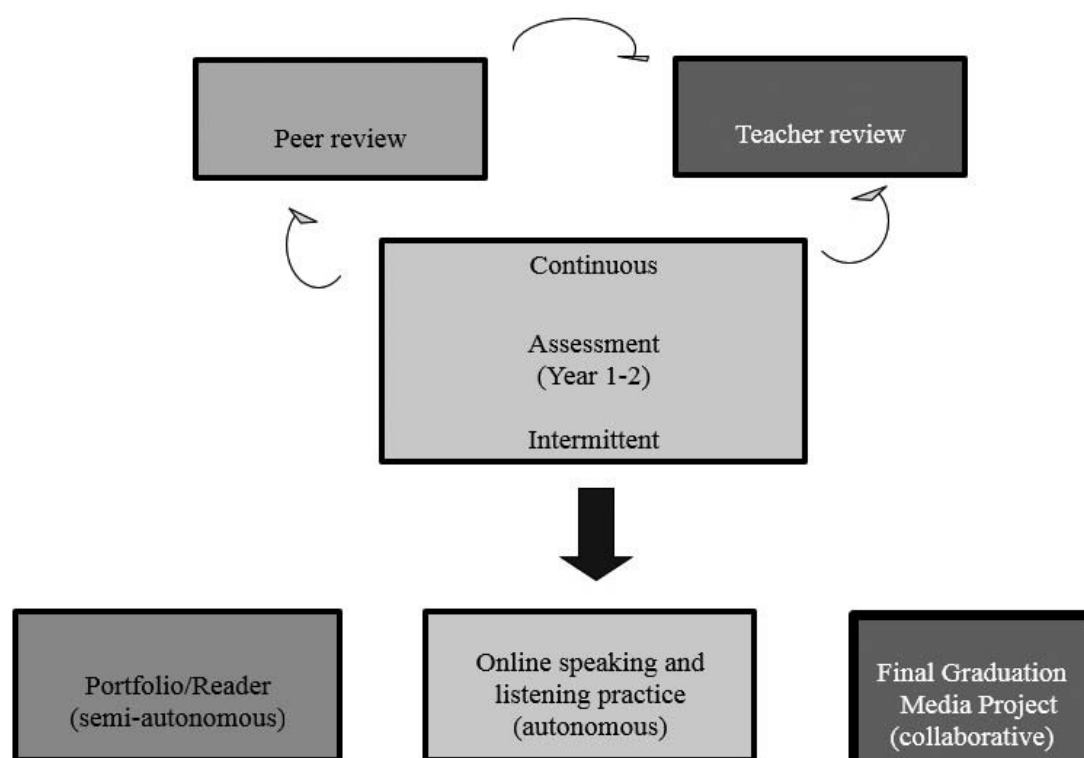

Figure 3: Assessment cycle.

New government subsidy prerequisites require English departments to employ online materials and/or internet websites in-class. Having an autonomous online course can certainly satisfy this aspect (Houshino, 2015). Having students use technology to study English is not so much a distraction as a chance to familiarize them with using English in their daily routines. Students already watch videos online and some even record their own. They use tablets and smart phone features on-a-daily-basis. Therefore, familiar technology can be used for independent, needs-based language input, reinforcement through structured practice, language production, and evaluation. It certainly facilitates *peer review* or commenting on each other's work by mitigating loss of *face*. Technology can be especially motivating during the PPP section of the curriculum. Butler (2015)

asserts that imitation, repetition and reviewing are fun and students ask for them.

Online practice, one example of technology-assisted language learning is best introduced in semester one. There are a variety of options available. Many are free but do not always offer integrated teacher supervision.

In selecting an online practice site, the following should be considered.

- Mobile device compatibility (as many students do not own a PC)
- Class creation options
- Continuous student performance analysis
- Integral grading (teachers do not calculate)
- Short communication lines in case of technical issues
- Courteous customer service

At a representative junior college, students practiced *listening, viewing and speaking* autonomously online using a video-based platform over a period of two years. A survey was taken once at the end of the school year 2015-2016, and once at the end of the following first semester 2016-2017. 45 first-year students and 24 second-year students participated. The results of this survey support the commonly accepted notion that students are still mostly unfamiliar with autonomous practice. Many students admitted that though they had downloaded English study apps, they were not using them regularly. The problem seemed to be the lack of oversight and/or deadlines. The video-based platform provided both oversight and a recurring deadline which students learned to plan towards. A large percentage of first-year students enjoyed using the online practice system, and felt they had benefited from it. A substantial section indicated positive learning outlooks as well. The second graders seemed to be more reticent. This could be attributed to the stress of having to adjust to new learning styles during their graduation year. Had they been introduced to the video-based platform in their first year, they would have had time to adjust. It would not be unreasonable then to expect a more positive response towards this part of the course (see appendix B).

The switch to TBI, PBI, intermittent and continuous assessment may bring major changes when applied to the full complement of English courses currently on offer. As Takamura (2016) explained, the English curriculum can and must support student autonomy and make transitioning to the work place smoother. With student autonomy increasing, professors' roles would necessarily evolve from lecturer to facilitator. This development comes with the extra benefit of increased class time to spend on individual students. Ultimately the resulting student awareness and teacher involvement could well lead to a much-desired increase in student participation.

Implementation track. A three-year window is needed to implement the new curriculum for both freshman and senior classes. Curriculum writing comes first on the timeline. With the Japanese scholastic year in mind, January to March, for instance, would necessarily see regular meetings and group email contact between EFL teachers. As Takamura (2016) said syllabi should be created as a team and responsibility should be shared equally. Therefore, a team of junior college English curriculum makers should include full-time and part-time English teachers. It is best for the heads of department to remain hands-off for the first 2 years allowing designers more flexibility. In trying to get support from college administrators for full implementation, offering evidence of inter-departmental cooperation and success can be convincing. These can then be presented at accountability meetings by responsible heads of department.

Risks and contingencies. A 5-year, collaborative action research project at Kamigahara Senior High School, Nagoya offers insight into the importance of open communication lines between colleagues. Feedback from teachers on their attempt to implement a TBLT curriculum identified issues with teamwork as one of their biggest objections. Even though team members had agreed on goals and even used the same handouts, they had different understandings about how to teach communicatively. For example, some included pair work, some did not (Sato, 2015). There had not been enough pre-thinking. The take-away is that planners should discuss the 'how' of TBI in advance to avoid mixed outcomes and intra-colleague friction. The selected approach must allow for continued, short communication trajectories. In addition, scheduled check and intervention points are best maintained for the duration of an implementation track.

Experienced teachers may be unfamiliar with TBI, PBI, TALL and CALL (see list of abbreviations, appendix B). Fortunately, changes in the curriculum are a chance to upgrade ourselves along with our students. Looking at this from a *can do* perspective, teamwork and team responsibility equals working off of each other's strengths. Gaps in knowledge can be handled through self-regulated team learning.

The team decides what knowledge is needed, when it is needed and how to bridge any gaps efficiently. Some tried and true ways to do so are professional development courses (PD), conferences, workshops, and symposia. At the Koning Willem II College in the Netherlands full-time teachers are required to take a number of PD courses to receive a raise. Professor K. admits to enjoying these courses as they help her keep abreast of educational developments and get ideas for her classroom. The stress of top-down enforcement is balanced out by the freedom to choose and schedule courses themselves. Generally, Japanese junior college teachers are completely free to select and match courses to our busy schedules. Taking schedule differences into account, the best co-learning options are: free online courses, JALT and IATEFL workshops, national conferences and targeted action research. Teacher training costs are negligible since free online courses abound.

Increased expenses are not a concern during the first stages on the implementation track. The only possible costs would be in procuring the hardware to provide *wifi* to students in junior college classrooms. Students can use their own devices. Newer, curriculum appropriate texts will need to be purchased by students. In the unlikely case that these will be more expensive than standard texts, this cost will be completely offset by the fact that departmentally selected and created materials will be used in the second year.

Alternate options. Upon initial discussion of the new curriculum, concerns about the introduction of TBI and the unfamiliarity with intra-departmental teamwork, may derail the process. To compensate for this, the curriculum template and track should be flexible enough to accommodate different learning speeds and styles. An alternate way to make the switch could have first year English courses remain teacher-centered with regular inclusion of tasks. Bilingual textbooks could be used for lower levels. The initial start would be more gradual, but could also shock students with suddenly having to adjust to a new approach in year two. Already busy students may get derailed.

Another option is to stick to the implementation track, but have teachers continue to select their own books and individual projects. This lack of overall coordination asks these same teachers to create TB materials on their own. Busy colleagues miss out on the chance to save time by sharing both work and feedback. In addition, students may complain about variances in task difficulty and assessment criteria. All-in-all the best option is collaboration and a gradual but structured introduction of TBI and PBI.

Checks and interventions. As with student language ability, curriculum efficacy should be evaluated continuously and systematically to guarantee quantifiable results. It is likely that in the near future junior colleges will be forced to compare results. Setting criteria for success and reporting on them becomes even

more important. These criteria must be closely related to the prioritized outcomes. Implementation of the new curriculum could start in the new school year April (see figure 4) and continue until March over the span of 2-3 years. The new syllabus, created at the start of the time-line, must include learner's needs analysis and student self-reflection using *Can Do* statements. In addition, time requirements, learning outcomes and what
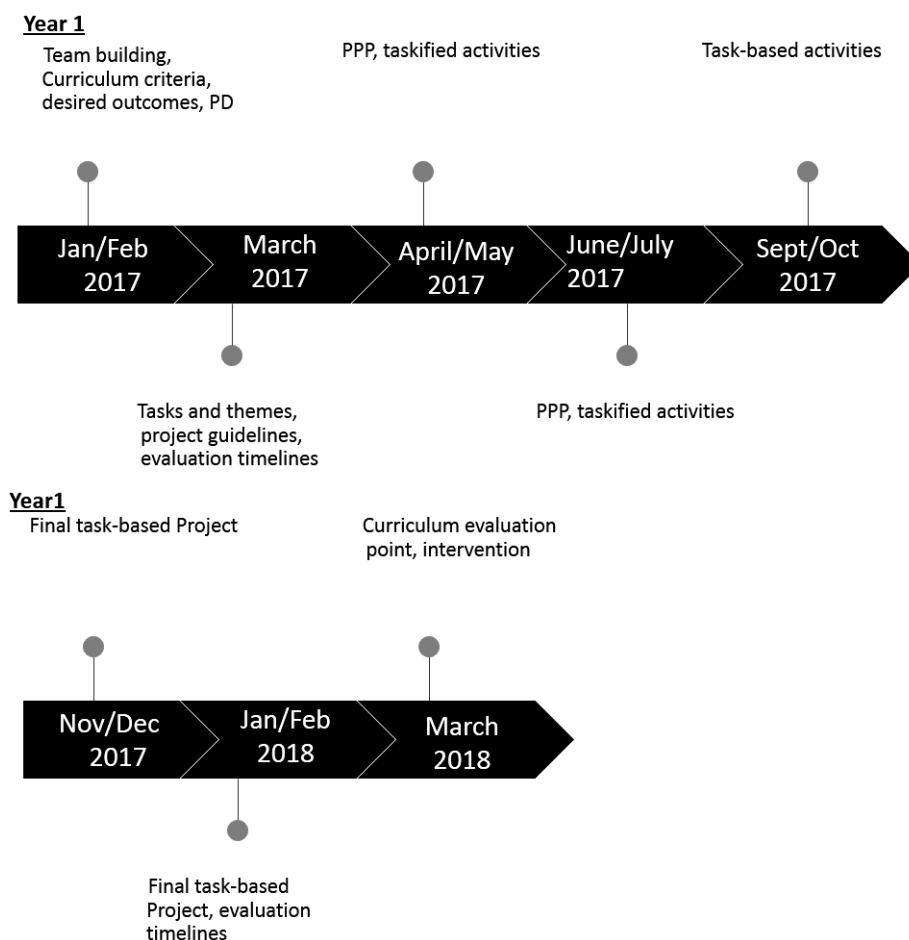
Year 1
Team building,
Curriculum criteria,
desired outcomes, PD

PPP, taskified activities

Task-based activities

| Jan/Feb 2017 | March 2017 | April/May 2017 | June/July 2017 | Sept/Oct 2017 |

Tasks and themes,
project guidelines,
evaluation timelines

PPP, taskified activities

Year1
Final task-based Project

Curriculum evaluation
point, intervention

| Nov/Dec 2017 | Jan/Feb 2018 | March 2018 |

Final task-based
Project, evaluation
timelines

Figure 4: Time line implementation new curriculum, example: 2017-2018.

is expected of students *in* and *out* of class should be clearly stated. Resources, learning activities and projects should be accessible and inclusive. This short-term approach will positively impact the local community as well. Some junior college graduates are likely to end up working in the Tokyo and Shizuoka areas during the upcoming Olympics in 2020. With this international event in mind, preparing graduates to deal with the communicative challenge of an influx of non-Japanese tourists equals supporting local businesses.

As English departments progress down the track, scheduling regular checkpoints may facilitate the collection of feedback from teachers and students. Adjustments to class-specific tasks, projects and assessment can be made accordingly. However, only by considering results and feedback from students who have gone through the whole curriculum can its overall efficacy and value be evaluated. Touching base with alumni during and after the Olympics could supply useful feedback on ways to adjust a new curriculum further. The final year can be reserved for making corrections to the coordinated, junior college EFL curriculum.

Conclusion. This paper stated that current workplace expectations require students to be independent, self-motivated and good communicators. These skills should be fostered in EFL courses as well, making a reform of the prevalent PPP-curriculum necessary. A short-term shift to a task-based curriculum offers a viable

solution since it fosters: language learner autonomy, sufficient communicative ability, intercultural sensitivity and intrinsic motivation for continued education. Assessment will move from summative to formative, from tests to collaborative projects. The team of teachers who will ultimately implement the new curriculum should create and evaluate it. The team will also be responsible for PD and effective communication. The new curriculum costs are negligible and will not affect departmental budgets negatively. To minimize resistance among both students and teachers, the first year will see a gradual introduction of TBI and PBI methods. The second year will have students fully engaged in project-based learning. Both the implementation and the evaluative process will have a maximum, observable societal impact. Graduates may get the chance to apply their acquired communication skills during the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. This makes for an ideal opportunity to see alumni in action and collect invaluable feedback on the new EFL curriculum as to its success.

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Appendix

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

TBI – Task-based Instruction

PBI – Project-based Instruction

TALL – Technology-assisted Language Learning

CALL – Computer-assisted Language Learning

Appendix B: Survey Autonomous Online Practice

1	At first, I was nervous about using EC.
2	Because I could choose my practice videos, I felt less nervous.
3	I am not nervous when I speak on EC.
4	English Central is easy to use.
5	It is easy to plan my practice time on my own.
6	It is easy to check my progress on EC.
7	I have tried different levels on EC.
8	I have tried the pronunciation video course.
9	I worry about making pronunciation mistakes on EC.
10	I keep trying even if I am nervous.
11	I worry if I can't understand every word on EC.
12	I skip parts that are very difficult.
13	I repeat the speaking sections many times in order to improve.
14	I remember the new words I study on EC.
15	I use the new words I study on EC.
16	EC helped me get used to hearing more English.
17	EC helped me practice tone and pauses.
18	EC helped me speak more freely in class.
19	I learned about cultures from the EC videos.
20	If I continue to study on EC, I will continue to improve.
21	I think we should do EC in class more often.
22	I think we should do EC outside class ONLY.
23	I enjoy practicing individually on line.
24	I feel EC practice is useful to my studies.

Appendix C: Short list of English language online course providers

Coursera   www.coursera.com

Cambridge English Webinars for Teachers   https://www.cambridgeenglishteacher.org/event-list

Future learn   https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/categories/teaching-and-studying

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/categories/languages-and-cultures

Macmillanenglish.com   http://www.macmillanenglish.com/webinars/

Oxford University Press

https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/webinars/?cc=gb&selLanguage=en&WT.ac=oup_webinars

Appendix D: Overview of effective projects, tasks and structures

As previously mentioned, educators in Japan and abroad continue to do action research and share their results nationally. Journals, conferences, workshops and seminars provide examples with varying desired outcomes. Each will have its advantages and disadvantages. Most may be reworked for our students and our college. The following are aimed at creating independent learners, students who motivate themselves, feel responsible for their own work, use specific strategies to study more effectively, are good at time management, do well when different options are provided (McVeigh, 2015).

- International, real time video calls. Benefits include student autonomy, motivation, life-long learning skills, communicative behavior, and the humanization of non-Japanese. Van der Zwaard (2015) states that telecollaboration through video call benefits enhance "more complex, face-appropriate behavior irrespective of the sequence of the digital media through which it is performed."
- Collaborative, real time video calls. Thurman and Horii's (2015) project inspired by Gonzalez-Lloret's thoughts on Blended Learning is centered around several video encounters guided by practice tasks building up to, a final task: a video call interview. After the interview findings are presented in the form of a media project.
- Video Blogs. (Willoughby, 2016). This project seeks to empower EFL students preparing to enter an English-medium liberal arts program in Thailand, and give them the chance to introduce themselves in a series of video logs, showcasing their skills and ambitions. They develop effective competencies in their common language, English.
- News report as a term project. (Sangar, 2016). After autonomous research, expert interviews using L2 and producing a video summary and explanation in L2 to be viewed by peers.

Appendix E: Learning goals section from the VOIS NPO online survey

What are your main language learning goals?

☐ Improving my listening

☐ Improving my confidence

☐ Improving my speaking speed

☐ Increasing my reaction speed

☐ Increasing my vocabulary

☐ Learning to make fewer mistakes

☐ Learning how to talk about and explain Japanese culture/history in English