

ARTICLES:

Planning Syllabus through Professional Partnership

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1. Introduction

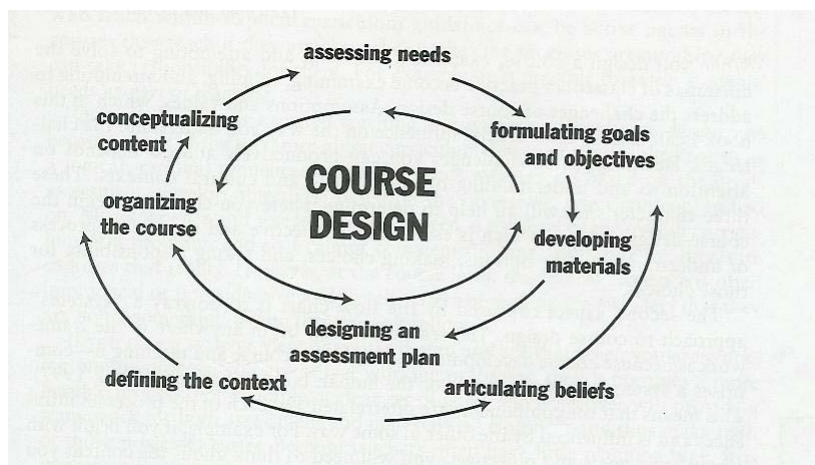
Designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course is a challenge faced by most tertiary teachers and what has made it even more complex is the number of choices available in this professional field. ESP has evolved into a professional field with multiple perspectives (Johns, 2002) and multi-disciplinary approaches (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) and sound research-based pedagogy (Belcher & Braine, 1995). Specifically, Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) practitioners take into account the needs of clients to develop academic courses through professional partnerships with the various stakeholders (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Therefore in most institutions of higher learning, ESP practitioners have to take on the role of academicians in developing courses as well as managers when identifying the needs of their clients. In this paper, an attempt will be made to share one such experience at *Nanyang Technological University* (NTU), Singapore, in designing, delivering and evaluating a writing course using the portfolio approach, which was specially tailored to the needs of its science students in the *School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences*. The paper will cover the course of events chronologically from the preliminary discussions between the subject specialists and language experts to negotiate course objectives, the development of the syllabus based on these mutually-agreed goals, the delivery and fine-tuning of the course to the final stage of evaluating the

curriculum taking into consideration feedback from tutors and students. The framework within which this was accomplished will be elaborated in the next section.

2. Processes of Course Development

There are several processes and sub-processes involved in designing a course and many frameworks have been proposed by curriculum design specialists. The one that best describes the processes employed in the present study is the one developed by Graves (1996, 2000, 2001). It is particularly appealing as it captures the dynamic nature of course development in that the processes are not displayed as being hierarchical and sequential. This means that no one process is more important than another but the context determines how these should be prioritized and these processes may be carried out non-sequentially in the planning, teaching and re-planning stages of course development. The other aspect that it portrays is that designing and teaching a course comprise a system as all the processes are interrelated, with each process influencing and being influenced by another. For instance, one cannot select content without taking into consideration the course objectives/goals or for that matter, assess a course without recourse to objectives and content. These two aspects of the framework are evident in the flow chart presented below:

Figure 1.1: A Framework of Course Development Process



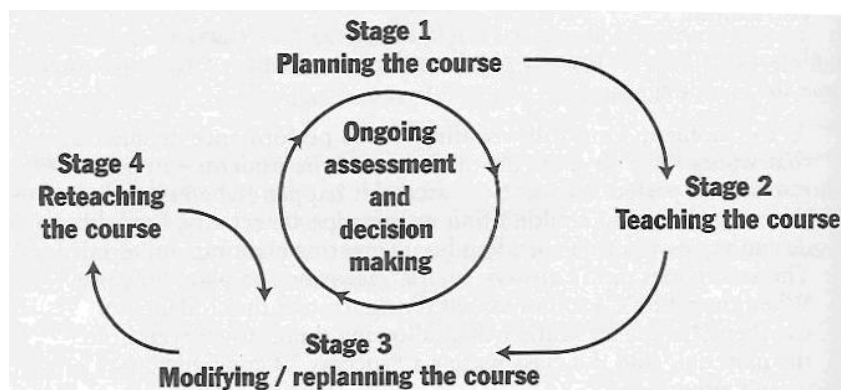
Taken from Graves (2000, p. 3)

Yet another aspect of this framework that is relevant to the present study and forms the foundation of all other processes is defining the context of the

course. This usually involves finding out information about the purpose of the course, the target students, the length of the course, the physical setting, teaching resources and expectations/beliefs that students, teachers or administrators might have. At every stage of course development, the main stakeholders who were constantly engaged in the decision-making process were the course coordinator of the writing course; the Director of the language centre; the Dean, Vice Dean and Heads of Divisions of the school that the course was being offered to; and the science students. Their contribution was vital in defining the context of the writing course.

The focus of this paper will be on the key developments and resulting decisions on matters such as course objectives, content, approach, structure and assessment of the writing course that were accomplished through a collegial partnership between the subject specialists and language experts. According to Johnson (1989, p.xiii), decision making in curriculum development is “a continuing and cyclical process of development, revision, maintenance and renewal which needs to continue throughout the life of the curriculum.” In the context of the figure below, this would mean that the stages of planning, teaching, modifying and re-teaching the course are repeated after each run.

Figure 1.2: The Cycle of Course Development



Taken from Graves (2000, p. 10)

In fact this process of renewal continued while the writing course was in progress and even after it was completed. The modifications were made in consultation with administrators, course tutors as well as students. The course was re-taught in the following semester to students from the *School of*

Biological Sciences and the negotiating process started all over again as the subject specialists and the target students were different, with slightly varying needs.

The negotiations between the various stakeholders of the writing course started at the beginning of the course and continued through the entire semester and beyond. These discussions will be presented using Graves' (2001) components listed in the following table:

Table 1: Framework Components

Needs assessment: What are my students' needs? How can I assess them so that I can address them?

Determining goals and objectives: What are the purposes and intended outcomes of the course? What will my students need to do or learn to achieve these goals?

Conceptualizing content: What will be the backbone of what I teach? What will I include in my syllabus?

Selecting and developing materials and activities: How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? What are my students' roles?

Organization of content and activities: How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? What are my students' roles?

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

Consideration of resources and constraints: What are the givens of my situation?

Taken from Graves (2001, p.179)

Using these framework components as a guide, the key developments and resulting decisions on matters such as objectives, content, approach, structure and assessment of the writing course will be traced in this paper. At every stage of the course development, mention will be made of the manner in

which meanings were negotiated between the several stakeholders, leading to a win-win outcome through a collegial partnership.

3. Development of the Writing Course

The whole process of course development started six months before the course was to be offered to the science students at NTU. The existing courses offered to the Engineering schools at NTU were not considered suitable for the needs of science students so the *Language and Communication Centre* was tasked with developing one especially for students whose majors were physics, chemistry and math. Although the main components that go into designing a course will be presented chronologically, in actual fact this was not the case as the course designers found themselves either back paddling and/or changing course to meet with the immediate and future needs of their clients. The course development will be presented in relation to the seven framework components of *Needs assessment, Determining goals and objectives, Conceptualizing content, Selecting and developing materials and activities, Evaluation, and Consideration of resources and constraints.*

3.1 Needs assessment

Needs assessment is not a one-time process but an on-going part of teaching which needs to be conducted in the planning (Stage 1), teaching (Stage 2) and re-planning (Stage 3) stages of course development. According to Dudley-Evans and St John, needs analysis is “the process of establishing the *what* and *how* of a course” (1998, p.121) and the best way to begin is to “do some groundwork which would include checking the literature for relevant articles, looking for ESP teaching material, contacting colleagues and organizations who might have experience of such groups, reading material about the subject or discipline” (1998, p. 123).

As the course was new and meant for the first batch of first year science students, the language teachers did not have recourse to these students until the first day of class. Therefore in our initial needs assessment, we had no choice but to rely on the School’s Dean, Vice Dean and Heads of Divisions. This approach is not uncommon as very often course designers have to rely on input from various people connected to a course (Graves, 2001). We found that we had to consult students’ future professors regarding what kind

of research writing their students were expected to do in their content courses and shape the writing course based on a “conception” of needs that were determined by the institution and other parties.

As “ongoing needs analysis within a course and formative evaluation have a lot in common” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 121), there was an overlap and interdependency in these two phases of course design. The tutors were consulted in the materials development phase and the feedback of the students was sought informally while teaching the course as well as formally at the end of the course by means of a course evaluation survey. Therefore adjustments were made to the teaching materials while the course was being taught as well at the re-planning phase when the course was revamped taking into account tutors’ feedback as well as that of students based on the survey results.

It became apparent to us that needs assessment is not value-free or a one time process. In the context of the writing course for science students, our experience was consistent with Graves (2001, p.181) in that “it is influenced by the teacher’s view of what the course is about, the institutional constraints, and the students’ perception of what is being asked of them”. In addition to that it was also clear to us that needs analysis is an on-going process as it not only takes time to identify needs but also because there is a high possibility of the needs and expectations of those involved to change over time.

3.2 Determining goals and objectives

Once the needs of the students have been established, the next step is to determine the goals and objectives of the course in order to set a clear sense of direction and framework for the teachers. While goals have been defined as “general statements of the overall, long-term purposes of the course”, objectives are viewed as “specific ways in which the goals will be achieved” (Graves, 2001, p181). The metaphor used to distinguish the two is that goals represent the destination whereas objectives chart the path to this destination.

In determining the objectives and goals/outcomes of the writing course, the Dean of the School gave us some useful tips in the form of websites of courses that he thought might be suitable for the students in his school. One

was on a general college writing course for undergraduates and the other one was an academic writing course specifically meant for science and engineering students. Due to the varying nature of the recommended courses, the language coordinator was not clear whether the school was keen on a “nuts and bolts” introductory college writing course or an English for Academic Writing course so two courses were proposed to the Vice Dean of the school:

<p>Course 1: The Craft of Writing (Prepared by Ms. Iris Teng)</p>	<p>Course 2: The Art of Academic Writing (Prepared by Dr. Sujata S Kathpalia)</p>
<p>Objectives This course will teach students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The building blocks of writing in order to help them develop verbal agility • Grammatical and stylistic variations so that they can develop a distinct and effective style of writing suitable for different purposes • Effective and engaging ways of recounting and reporting events and experiences • The tools of becoming more versatile and responsible writers 	<p>Objectives This course will teach students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic writing conventions, practices and purposes • Writing for different writing purposes in science • Strategies for becoming ethical and responsible writers • Grammatical and stylistic variations appropriate for different scientific purposes
<p>Desired Outcome Upon completing this course, students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make words and sentences work for them rather than against them • Write confidently and effectively for personal, academic, and professional purposes • Read and critique a written work, including paragraphs and essays 	<p>Desired Outcome Upon completing this course, students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze academic situations, purposes and audiences • Write evaluative, analytical, argumentative and research papers in science • Integrate and acknowledge information from other sources • Use language and style appropriate for scientific writing

Upon receiving the two proposals, the Vice Dean responded that the course on academic writing “The Art of Academic Writing” appeared to be more appropriate for their students, with the topics of research proposal and research paper writing being highly relevant to science students. On receiving

this confirmation, it was possible to move to the next stage of course development.

3.3 Conceptualizing content

Conceptualizing content is no longer an easy or straightforward aspect of course design due to the many options available in language teaching such as the focus on ESP, the various approaches and methods of language teaching and the diversification among student learners (Graves, 2001; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Richards, 2001). As the choices a teaching practitioner makes now are context-dependent, a number of factors have to be taken into consideration “such as who the students are, their goals and expectations in learning English, the teacher’s own conception of what language is and what will best meet the students’ needs, the nature of the course, and the institutional curriculum” (Graves, 2001, p.183).

A syllabus is an important document in the teaching/learning process for many reasons. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), it reassures sponsors and students that their investment of money and/or time will be worthwhile and that considerable amount of thought has gone into designing the course. In addition, it breaks down the components of a course into manageable parts and provides a practical basis for division of assessment, textbooks and learning time. The most important use of syllabuses in education is that it enables practitioners to ensure that standardization is achieved both in teaching and assessment.

The syllabus for the writing course was designed keeping in mind the preliminary needs assessment, course objectives and desired outcomes that were identified. To start off with, the emphasis of the syllabus was on common-core academic language and skills with inclusion of some specific writing related to students’ subject disciplines. However, this syllabus was altered on the advice of the Vice Dean of the school who felt that science students in his school would require more help with subject-specific writing skills. The two syllabuses, one that is a general *English for Academic Purposes* syllabus and the other which is an *English for Specific Purposes* syllabus are reproduced below:

<p style="text-align: center;">Original Syllabus English for Academic Purposes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Revised syllabus English for Specific Purposes</p>
<p>Rhetorical Style and Strategy: Students will learn how to analyze rhetorical situations - the way reader, writer, subject and purpose influence the writer's work – and they will learn how good writers choose effective rhetorical strategies, words, structures, reasons, and appeals in different academic contexts. [6 hours]</p> <p>Analytical Writing: Students will learn how to write extended definitions, analyze and describe processes, and explain causes-and-effects. [3 hours]</p> <p>Academic Arguments: Students will learn how to write an academic argument by taking a position on a question at issue, giving reasons for the position, providing evidence that supports it and taking into consideration other possible answers. [3 hours]</p> <p>Research Writing: Students will learn important research skills such as identifying research questions, gathering information and data, evaluating sources, synthesizing ideas (summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting), and reporting research findings. [15 hours]</p> <p>Designing Documents: <u>Document Design</u> – Students will learn to select presentational features like space, typography, alignment and graphics to enhance verbal messages. <u>Revising and Editing</u> – Students will learn how to write in a coherent, cohesive, clear and concise manner. They will also learn strategies for improving structure, grammar and syntax. [6 hours]</p>	<p>Style and Strategies: Students will learn how to write about science by setting clear goals and meeting the needs of the audience. They will be introduced to style and strategies appropriate for scientific discourse. [5 hours]</p> <p>Scientific Essays: Analytical Writing – Students will learn how to write scientific essays by means of extended definitions, analysis and description of processes, comparison of competing theories and/or consequences of a new scientific fact or theory. <u>Academic Arguments</u> – Students will learn how to write academic argument by taking a position on a question at issue in science, giving reasons for the position, providing evidence that supports it and taking into consideration other possible answers. [8 hours]</p> <p>Research Writing: Students will learn important research skills such as identifying research questions, integrating and documenting information (summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting), describing research methodology and reporting research findings. They will learn the conventions of writing the different sections of scientific reports such as Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results and Conclusion. [20 hours]</p> <p>Designing Documents: <u>Document Design</u> – Students will learn to select presentational features like space, typography, alignment and graphics to enhance their writing. <u>Revising and Editing</u> – Students will learn how to</p>

	write in a style appropriate for scientific writing. They will not only learn how to write coherently, clearly and concisely but also learn strategies for improving structure, grammar and syntax. [3 hours]
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The justification underlying the choice of syllabus was that a general academic writing course would not familiarize science students with the complex linguistics demands of writing scientific genres such as scientific essays, literature reviews and experimental reports which require a combination of description and persuasion for a sophisticated scientific argument.

One of the commonest uses of a syllabus is that it defines the choice of a textbook and materials most suitable for the course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This became apparent in the writing course when it came to textbook selection. Out of the two books recommended to the school: *A Short Guide to Writing about Science* by Porush and *A Sequence for Academic Writing* by Behrens, Rosen and Beedles, the former was selected over the latter. This reaffirmed to us that the school was keen on an *English for Specific Purposes* writing course for its students as opposed to one that focused on general academic writing skills.

3.4 Selecting and developing materials and activities

In this stage of course design, tutors play a crucial role as “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 own role in the classroom” (Graves, 2001, p. 188). In the context of the writing course, the Deans and Professors of the school played an active part in needs assessment, setting of objectives and goals, and conceptualizing content. However from this point onwards, the coordinator of the course shifted her attention from the clients to the tutors, drawing them into decisions related to the teaching/learning approach, development of materials and organization of the course.

The first task in the planning phase of the course was to convince the tutors that the portfolio approach would be most suitable for a writing course as portfolios combine the process and product teaching approaches, consolidating teaching and assessment practices. Once the tutors were convinced about the merits of the portfolio approach, the next step was to decide on the type of portfolios to be employed, whether *Document* (or working), *Evaluation* or *Showcase* portfolios. Other issues that were debated included the number and types of assignments to be included for assessment, the number of drafts allowed for submission as well as arguments on whether tutors should determine the assignments or students be allowed to select and submit their best pieces.

As for the content of the course, lecture topics were identified and their sequence was determined. This involved some negotiation as it was felt that certain topics like the style of scientific writing should be presented at the beginning of the course. The lecture presentations and the designing of the tutorial tasks were then distributed amongst the four tutors. For the sake of consistency, it was agreed that the coordinator would come up with the first tutorial handout taking into consideration the portfolio approach with its planning, writing and editing activities as well as self-reflection and peer-editing checklists. This format would then be followed by the others when creating handouts for the topics assigned to them. Some broad guidelines were also established in that the materials could be entirely new, selected from other sources or adapted from existing materials as long as they achieved the purpose of the particular tutorial unit and were appropriate for science students in terms of relevance to subject discipline, familiarity of topics, language level and interest. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), ESP practitioners have to be good providers of materials but do not necessarily have to prepare new materials from scratch as that would be time-consuming and impractical.

When it comes to organization of course materials “whether one follows a fixed sequence or adopts a more fluid approach to the order in which one teaches the content, part of course development is figuring out systems for organizing the course” (Graves, 2001, p.189). In terms of organization of the materials over the 13 week semester, the guiding principle was to sequence

the materials in terms of difficulty of the writing task, from easy to difficult, with a progression from summary writing, essay writing to report writing. In addition, taking into consideration the composing process, tutorials were organized in such a manner that we began with brainstorming activities like unscrambling a target genre, then proceeded to the actual writing and ended each unit with revision of the draft. These chronologically sequenced activities were sometimes spread over two to three weeks depending upon the level of difficulty of the writing assignment. On completion of one unit, the cycle was repeated for the next writing assignment. The sequence of the various tutorials was determined amicably in consultation with the tutors.

Although materials were designed prior to the course in the planning stage, we found that materials development in fact continued through the teaching and re-planning phases. This is consistent with the experience of other course designers who feel that “course design may be carried out before the course takes place and the details may be revised either during the course or, more likely, after the course has been run” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.154). While the writing course was in session, materials were revised or completely changed based on tutor and student feedback. For instance, a pre-writing task was introduced to prepare students for writing the review paper and the handout on writing results was replaced with a more interactive task on data analysis and presentation. These last minute changes were made as it was felt that students needed to get familiar with the literature review genre before attempting to write it and also because classes needed to be livened up with some active student interaction. Materials continued to be modified and revamped in the post-course phase as the course was meant to be re-taught to a different cohort of science students in the *School of Biological Sciences*. Moreover, it was felt that some of the authentic scientific texts and reports used in the course were too difficult for undergraduate science students as well as the language tutors.

3.5 Evaluation

Evaluation in the context of courses involves assessment of what students have learned within the course in terms of proficiency, progress or achievement and the assessment of the course itself. In this connection, ESP practitioners usually make a distinction between *formative evaluation* and

summative evaluation. While *formative evaluation* “takes place during the development and implementation of the curriculum for purposes of modifying it as it is being developed”, *summative evaluation* “takes place after the curriculum has been implemented, for purposes of evaluating its success and improving it for future implementation” (Graves, 2001, p. 191).

In the writing course, the coordinator proposed the use of student portfolios as it was felt that a writing course should be evaluated by means of writing done through the semester rather than by an end-of-semester exam. The justification submitted to the school to which the course was being offered as well as to the Board of Examiners is presented below:

Rationale for 100% Continual Assessment

In this course, the portfolio approach will be used for assessment. This approach is particularly suitable for writing courses as it chronicles the growth of students’ skills in the writing process. In education, the emphasis is often on the products students create rather than the outcomes they achieve, without special attention given to the processes required in creating those products or outcomes. However, the portfolio approach with its potential for focusing on the process of learning gives insight into processes involved in self-diagnosis and self-improvement as well as the metacognitive processes of thinking, through the use of self-reflection, peer evaluation and tutor feedback sheets. Students will be assessed on 4 substantial pieces of written work from their writing portfolios. Using the writing portfolio for student assessment has been the accepted practice in universities in America and other countries. It is the norm for such courses not to have exams.

The proposal was accepted by all parties concerned – the administration, clients and tutors. However, students felt that managing portfolios would be a daunting and time consuming task. To alleviate their initial fears and to make the process manageable, time was spent with students at the start of the course to go over some practical and logistical issues in relation to organizing, collecting and filing their written work. Tutors had similar fears in relation to marking and assessment of portfolios, especially in relation to the marking of multiple drafts. In order to make the marking more manageable, it was decided that assignments would be limited to four and would only require marking twice, once to provide detailed qualitative

feedback and the next time for grading. In addition to the four set assignments to be included in the *Showcase Portfolio*, a certain percentage of the marks were set aside for the *Documentation* or “working” portfolio which included everything from student brainstorming activities to drafts of finished products. By assigning responsibility of the *Documentation* portfolios to students and *Showcase* portfolios to tutors, the task was made less onerous for both parties. In this manner, the assessment for this course combined both formative as well as summative evaluation through the use of two different types of portfolios.

In the context of curriculum design, evaluation can be both quantitative and qualitative. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), questionnaires provide specific percentages and numbers on “what” questions related to course design but are not able to address the “how” and “why” questions. In the questionnaire designed for the writing course, most of the questions were close-ended questions on course objectives, content, approach and assessment but three of the questions at the end of the questionnaire were open-ended (Things I like about this course are; Things I dislike about this course are; Improvements I would like to suggest are). The questionnaire was administered to both students and tutors, with the responses to the open-ended questions being the most useful in terms of improving the course for the next run. In addition to the formal questionnaire which gave us a summative evaluation of the course, formative evaluation through tutor observations of students in class, informal chats with students, feedback sessions with students and tutors’ own reflections played an important role in evaluating the course.

3.6 Consideration of resources and constraints

According to Graves (2001, p. 192), the givens of a teaching situation whether tangible or intangible cannot be ignored as “they play a primary role in the development of a course because it is in considering the givens that a teacher begins to make sense of processes such as needs assessment and material selection”. The constraints and resources of a situation can take many forms such as books, technology, classroom and time. What is important to realize is that what is a constraint to one teacher may be a resource to another but whatever the case, the advice given by experts is to

accept the givens of a situation and work around them for optimal results. One way to make the best of a situation is by means of problematizing or “defining the challenges of one’s situation so that one can make decisions about what to do” (Graves, 2001, p. 192).

There were many givens that we had to take into consideration while planning the writing course. These included the structure of the course, timetabling constraints, non-availability of computer labs, student cohorts, class size and passing criteria. Some of these givens were a consequence of institutional philosophy and policy. For instance, the structure of the course was pre-determined as all core subjects that fall under the General Education category are meant to have a 1 hour lecture and 2 hours of tutorial weekly over a 13-week semester. Ideally, a three hour workshop would have been the best but lectures had to be introduced into the writing course to fulfill the criteria of a “GER-Core” subject, which means that it is compulsory general subject for science students. Although students and tutors alike would have preferred classes later in the day, all writing classes were scheduled in the morning at 8.30 due to a tight schedule for the subject/content courses. The writing classes also had to be held in regular tutorial rooms due to a lack of computing labs and this meant that the students had to write by hand in class, making it difficult for them to incorporate tutor feedback to revise their drafts on the spot.

Another issue that was relevant with respect to the course was that the students comprised Chemistry, Physics and Math students with slightly varying writing needs, especially in the case of the Math students. The Head of the Math Division therefore suggested that the students be grouped according to their majors so we could cater to their differing needs. His major concern was that Mathematicians use different approaches from experimental scientists (Biologists, Chemists and Physicists) and grouping them separately would enable us to design materials to suit their needs. In fact, the course textbook was also not ideal for Math students and two other books suitable for writing in the mathematical sciences were recommended by the Head of Division. To resolve the issues that were raised by the Head, we grouped the students according to their majors and designed separate tutorial materials for the math students. However, it was more difficult to sort out the textbook

issue as it did not make academic sense to have two different textbooks for the same course. Finally, the issue was resolved by including the two Math primers recommended by the Head as reference books for the course.

A final issue of concern had to do with the number, levels and cultural backgrounds of the students. As mentioned earlier, the students were grouped according to their majors and this posed a problem with the sizes of some classes. Whereas we managed to maintain class sizes of 22 students for the Chemistry and Physics groups, the sizes of the Math classes were larger as there were altogether 50 Math students. This posed a challenge as the tutors had to juggle around the activities to ensure that enough time was available for individual feedback and consultation sessions with students, both inside and outside the classroom. Yet another issue related to students was their differing levels of proficiency partly due to their different backgrounds. This issue was raised by the School in connection with the passing criteria for the course. The School proposed that the Pass/Fail mode of assessment be used for their students in the writing course as the aim was to help them improve their writing skills, without necessarily excelling in it within such a short period of time. Their proposal was accepted and the decision was made known to the students and tutors. Most students, especially the foreign students welcomed this mode of assessment as it meant that their cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) would not be affected due to their performance in the writing course and they also felt that they could improve their writing in a relaxed atmosphere without the added pressure of getting high grades in the course. The tutors accepted this decision with less enthusiasm as they were concerned that student attendance and motivation would drop as a consequence of this decision.

4. Conclusion

Although a syllabus is multi-functional, it has several limitations in that it can only function as “a statement of an ideal” both from the point of view of what will be taught and learnt. It does not take into account intangible factors such as emotions, personalities, subjective views and motivation which are crucial to learning; it is basically an approximate blueprint of what will be taught in a course. This experience of designing a course made it clear that course development is a complex process in which course designers and teachers

have to consider multiple factors in their decision making. Through this experience, it also became apparent that teachers cannot plan their teaching in abstract scenarios but need to come to terms with the givens in a situation to proceed smoothly. As decisions related to the course are often not made independently but in partnership with the many stakeholders, the writing course was a result of continuous ongoing negotiation between the main stakeholders on matters such as course objectives, content, approach, structure, assessment and teaching resources. These amicable negotiations lead to a win-win outcome through a collegial partnership between subject specialists, language experts and students. However, the course survey made it evident that this process of negotiation is continuous and the cycle of renewal will continue every time the course is re-taught.

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ABSTRACT

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In most institutions of higher education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has evolved into a professional field that has multiple perspectives (Johns, 2002), multi-disciplinary approaches (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), and sound research-based pedagogy (Belcher & Braine, 1995). Specifically, ESP practitioners take into account the needs of clients to develop academic courses through professional partnerships with the various stakeholders (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The authors would like to share one such experience at *Nanyang Technological University* (Singapore) in designing, delivering and evaluating a writing course using the portfolio approach, which was specially tailored to the needs of its science students in the *School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences*. The presentation will cover the course of events chronologically from the preliminary discussions between the subject specialists and language experts to negotiate course objectives, the development of the syllabus based on these mutually-agreed goals, the delivery and fine-tuning of the course to the final stage of evaluating the curriculum taking into consideration feedback from tutors and students. The focus will be on the key developments and resulting decisions on matters such as content, approach, structure and assessment of the writing course that lead to a win-win outcome through a collegial partnership between the subject specialists and language experts.
