

Language curriculum design: possibilities and realities

Kathleen Graves

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The focus of this chapter is on curriculum planning—how one designs a curriculum. This chapter examines language curriculum design from two perspectives: the possible *content* of the curriculum, i.e. decisions about what students will learn, how they will learn and why, and the planning *processes* that guide these decisions.

DEFINITIONS—CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS

Curriculum and syllabus are both concerned with the same question: *what* students learn. The purpose of curriculum and syllabus design is to determine what students will learn and to describe a plan for how they will learn it. There are regional differences in how the terms are used. In Britain and countries with historical connections to it, the term syllabus is used at different levels of scale ranging from descriptions of what will be learned in individual courses, to what will be learned in school subjects over a period of time. In Australia, for example, the national *curriculum* describes “what young Australians should learn as they progress through schooling. It sets out essential knowledge, understanding, skills and capabilities and provides a national standard for student achievement in core learning areas.” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2014.)

The state of New South Wales has developed *syllabuses* for each subject based on the Australian curriculum. The English syllabus ‘identifies essential knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes. It outlines clear standards of what students are expected to know and be able to do in K-10. It provides structures and processes by which teachers can provide continuity of study for all students.’ (Board of Studies, New South Wales 2014.) In the Australian case, the curriculum is a set of educational specifications of what students should achieve and the syllabus is a more detailed, localised description of what students will learn and how.

In the US and countries connected to it, a syllabus is a document that outlines the content and requirements of a course. The term curriculum is used more broadly. Thus, where in Britain one may have a school syllabus or a program syllabus, in the US one will have a school curriculum or a program curriculum.

For the purposes of this chapter, curriculum is the superordinate term, and syllabus a subordinate term. Richards (2013) distinguishes the terms as follows:

The term *curriculum* is used here to refer to the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved. ...

Once content has been selected it then needs to be organized into teachable and learnable units as well as arranged in a rational sequence. The result is a *syllabus*. (p. 6) [Italics added]

As in Richards' definition, curriculum is commonly understood as a plan for learning as distinct from the actual learning experiences that occur in (or outside) of the classroom. Curriculum theorists in general education suggest that there are multiple dimensions of curriculum. According to Ylimaki (2013: 28) the relevant dimensions are the intended curriculum, the enacted curriculum, the assessed curriculum, the learned curriculum and the hidden curriculum. The intended curriculum comprises the content learners are expected to learn, the enacted curriculum refers to what learners are actually taught, the assessed curriculum refers to the skills and knowledge learners acquire as documented through formative and summative assessments, the learned curriculum are the effects, intended or unintended of the educational experience. The hidden curriculum refers to what is implied to students by what (and who) is included or left out of the curriculum experience such as types of knowledge and availability of resources (Apple 2004).

For curriculum and course designers I suggest that curriculum is the dynamic interplay of three interconnected processes: planning, enacting and evaluating. In this view, curriculum is not just a design for learning, it is also the learning itself, i.e. it is both the plan and the enactment. The enacted curriculum is what happens in the classroom among learners and teacher. Without it, the curriculum plan is an artifact (Graves 2008, 2014). Ideally, enactment is informed and guided by the design and made more effective as a result of evaluation, but this depends on how well curriculum planners have taken into account the realities of the classroom and educational context and whether evaluation is actually carried out.

This chapter focuses on the planning process—how one makes decisions about what will be learned. In ELT, these decisions are complex for two reasons: language is not intrinsically a subject matter, and people learn languages for different purposes in different contexts.

Language is not intrinsically a subject matter

Language, of itself, is not an educational subject, but a resource human beings use for meaning-making in all aspects of their lives. In order to be taught and learned in a classroom, language must be turned into curriculum content. Curriculum content in ELT has been influenced by research in linguistics and second language acquisition, by global trends in immigration, and by the emergence and dominance of English as the language of business, science and technology. Below I outline three successive, overlapping waves of curriculum content: the linguistic curriculum, the communicative curriculum, and the third wave curriculum. While they are in some

ways chronological, there is considerable overlap among them, and they are each still very much in play. Each wave carries some of what came before, and all draw from the same ocean.

First wave: The linguistic curriculum

A traditional view of curriculum content is that it is an external body of knowledge that is broken down into its components and built up, component by component in order to reach some sort of knowledge mastery. In this view, all learners who are taught the curriculum are meant to master the same body of knowledge. Who the learners are and what their needs are is irrelevant. In language teaching, this notion of curriculum as an external body of knowledge is based on a view of language as a set of grammatical, morphological and phonological rule-governed systems. Curriculum content is based on *grammatical patterns* and language features that are built up, pattern by pattern, to form sentences and dialogues. Typically, these patterns or features are coupled with *topic-based* or *situational vocabulary*. Language teaching materials for such a curriculum might be organized around situational dialogues that include the target grammar and vocabulary, as well as grammar and pronunciation exercises.

Second wave: The communicative curriculum

Developments in sociolinguistics in the 70's and 80's brought about a major shift in understanding of language. Rather than a set of components to be combined and mastered, language was defined as socially situated communication in which appropriate use of language depended on the ability to speak, write, read and understand it for a variety of purposes in a wide range of settings. The linguistic curriculum was deemed inadequate, as it did not prepare students to actually use the language. Thus the purposes for which language is used, its *functions*, became a focus of curriculum content (Wilkins 1976). Hymes's (1971) theory of communicative competence was developed into a model that included linguistic competence, sociolinguistic, strategic competence and discourse competence (Canale 1983). The notion of language proficiency in the four skills of *reading, writing, speaking and listening*, for communication gained traction and these became building blocks of the curriculum (Omaggio 1983). Constructs of each skills and attendant subskills were developed

Learning strategies also became a component of curriculum content. Learning strategies are "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques...used by students to enhance their own learning. (Scarcella and Oxford 1992, p. 63 cited in Oxford 2001). Early strategy work focused on the strategic competence component of communicative competence--strategies for maintaining and repairing communication. As research into the macro skills grew, strategies grew to encompass those associated with each of the skills. Strategy use has also been linked to models of information processing in SLA and various taxonomies of strategies have been developed over the years (Purpura 2014.)

Research in the 70's and 80's in the fledgling field of second language acquisition focused on the processes of acquiring a language, particularly the importance of learning through interaction and negotiation of meaning. *Tasks*, which required communication between two or more learners in order to achieve an outcome, thus became an element of curriculum content (Long and Crookes 1992). Task is an amorphous term that has been defined and interpreted in different ways and has evolved in meaning from the early 80s (Richards 2013). In communicative language teaching, the intent is for tasks to mirror the kinds of tasks learners will be expected to perform outside of the classroom. "The closer the link between the pedagogical and experiential worlds, the greater the task authenticity." (Nunan 2014: 461.) The point for curriculum is that tasks focus on communicative processes, rather than mastery of specific linguistic content. Tasks are alinguistic in the sense that how they are accomplished depends on the individuals using whatever linguistic resources are available to accomplish them, rather than being constructed or defined by certain language choices.

The communicative wave thus introduced functions, strategies, the four individual macroskills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, and tasks as elements of curriculum content. These elements are aimed at developing skills in communication, or communicative competence. Paradoxically, although communicative competence is based on an understanding of language as context-dependent, descriptions of it tend to be acontextual in the sense that they describe generic abilities in the four macro skills. For example, in the Council of Europe Frame of Reference (2001), the self-assessment grid from the Common Reference Levels for a B1 ability in spoken interaction states:

I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events). (p. 24)

In that sense, the descriptor is aimed at all learners, and doesn't take into account actual contexts of use. Leung (2010, 165, cited in Richards 2013, 27) states the case this way:

Quite clearly teachers will need to judge the appropriateness of the B1 descriptors (or any other within the CEFR scales) in relation to the students they are teaching. ... If one is teaching linguistic minority students in England who are learning to use English to do academic studies, then these descriptors would only be, at best, appropriate in a very vague and abstract sense; they would need to be adapted and expanded locally because an independent user of English as a second language in school would have to do a good deal more than what is covered in these CEFR descriptors.

A communicative view of language is not adequate for those who need English for specific professional or academic purposes, that is, for specific contexts of use, such as the linguistic minority students mentioned by Leung, or adults who will use English in their professions.

Leung's comment highlights an important feature of the complexity of language curriculum design—the curriculum content for those learning English can vary markedly depending on who the learners are, their purposes for learning and the contexts in which they are learning. One factor that determines and distinguishes

curriculum content is whether the students for whom it is intended have immediate, identifiable needs for the language in or outside of the classroom. In other words, whether they are preparing to participate (or already participate) in a target discourse community. For these learners, it is possible to identify text types they will need to understand or produce, tasks they will need to perform, and content they will need to learn. Work done in the classroom is thus actual language performance, as with immigrant children learning subject matter in and through English, or language performance that feeds into target performance, as with adults and young adults who are learning the genres and lexicon that will enable them to participate in their target discourse community.

In other environments, students' needs for the language are not linked with target discourse communities. These include school-age learners in most countries where English is a required subject, from an increasingly earlier age and many adult learners who study English because it is supposed to give them economic and social opportunities. Depending on how the curriculum is designed, the classroom may focus on learning about language—the linguistic curriculum; it may focus on learning English for communicative purposes, in which case the classroom becomes a rehearsal space for tasks that students may engage in at some later time. The curriculum may also create a context of use for the language, through investigation of texts, through the learning of content, or through project work.

Third wave

The third wave of curriculum content includes curricula organized around genre, texts, content, and projects. They each have the potential to engage learners in a context of use, either through apprenticeship into discourse communities as with genre and text, or by creating a common focus for meaning-making through exploration of content or involvement in projects.

Genre and text-based learning

Genre and text-based approaches to syllabus are both concerned with context of use. They both view text as the unit of analysis of language. A text is language structured in a certain way 'to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use' (Hyland 2007: 148). Genres, such as academic essays and research articles, are texts particular to a discourse community. According to Paltridge (2014):

Genres, in this view, both respond and contribute to the constitution of social contexts, as well as the socialisation of individuals. Miller (1984: 165) argues that genres 'serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community' and that the failure to understand genre as social action turns activities such as writing instruction from 'what should be a practical art of achieving social ends into an act of making texts that fit formal requirements', a view that has important implications for genre-based teaching. (pp. 303-304)

In language curriculum, genre is most closely associated with the teaching of writing for academic purposes. Learning genre is thus a matter of learning to construct the texts of a given discourse community in order to participate and gain membership in the community defined by the texts.

Text as curriculum content is closely related to genre and the two are often used interchangeably. According to Mican, a curriculum that focuses on texts foregrounds their social purpose. “The priority is to determine what is going on in a context and how language is integral to what is taking place.” (Mican 2013: p. 23) Texts are viewed as social practices that are chosen according to who the learners are and their target needs. Much of the work on texts has come out of Australia and is rooted in Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics. In Australia, text-based syllabuses have served the needs of adult migrant populations and learners in schools (Feez and De Silva Joyce 2012). For example, Mican (2013: 64-64) describes a program for migrant students in a secondary school science class who learn to participate in science practices through literacy events and lab work. Some of the text practices include following textbook instructions, interpreting diagrams, conducting an experiment and interpreting and documenting results. Lexico-grammatical features of language, such as ‘let the solution cool’ are learned while participating in the practices. In both genre and text-based approaches, the lexical and grammatical features of the language that construct the text go hand-in-hand with the expression of the text.

Content-based learning

A curriculum may also be built around subject matter content. In the secondary science example described by Mican, the content is science. In the school context, this is not a language curriculum based on content, but a science class in which the learners are learning the content in and through English. In a curriculum based on content, (known as CBI or Content-based instruction in US ELT and CLIL or Content and language integrated instructions in European ELT), subject matter content is the basis for decisions about instructional texts and tasks that learners will undertake to investigate and demonstrate learning of the content.

According to Ioannou Georgiou (2012), CLIL creates:

...an authentic setting of meaningful learning where the students can engage in exploring and finding out about the world while using a foreign language to do so. Moreover, CLIL creates a situation where the students use the language as they learn it rather than spending years ‘rehearsing’ in a language class for a possible opportunity to use the language some time in the future. (p. 496)

The investigation of content has the potential to create a context of use in the sense that the content provides a common focus for meaning-making—exploring and finding out about the world, and for using the target language to do so—‘they use the language as they learn it’. It also makes use of the context of the classroom in ways that are congruent with its social practices. Classrooms are natural contexts for classroom texts, roles, and activities that revolve around subject-matter. They are not natural contexts for other types of roles, texts and tasks, e.g. socializing, getting things done, etc. In the latter case, the classroom becomes a rehearsal space—to rehearse types of language use in the classroom that could later be ‘performed’ outside the classroom in target contexts or for target purposes. This is an example of the second wave, in which learners roleplay ordering food in a restaurant, for example, or complete simulated job applications.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning, like content-based learning, has the potential to create a context of use either in or beyond the classroom. Project-based language learning uses a project or projects as the focus of curriculum content. Learners work individually and cooperatively to complete a complex task through inquiry, research and problem solving in English. Projects may involve ongoing performance and may also result in a product of some kind, such as a research report, a performance or a presentation (Beckett, 2006; Stoller, 2006). For example, a teacher in Thailand describes his course to his students:

“English for Tourism is a project-based course. There will be two projects. ...The first project aims to help you understand foreign tourists more, and to help you feel confident when you communicate. The second project aims to give you practice at being a tour guide in a real situation and use the skills you have learned.”
Knox p.140

The first project involved group interviews at the airport of departing tourists about their experience in Thailand, followed by a presentation based on the interview information. The second project involved giving a group tour of a temple. The projects combined work on language to prepare for and within actual contexts of use.

Technology as part of the third wave

Technology has played a role in both the linguistic and communicative curriculum waves consonant with their underlying view of language (Dudeney and Hockly 2012). For the third wave, especially for content and project-based learning, the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies have made it possible to design courses that are rich in content, provide means for authentic interactions and collaboration, as well as self-directed learning (Maggi, Cherubin & Pascual 2014). Content is available for every possible theme or topic. Curriculum designers, teachers and learners with Internet access, have access to this wealth of content in multi-modal forms. The interactivity of Web 2.0 technology allows learners to use the language as a means for collaborating and communicating with others, thus breaking down the notion of the classroom as a closed context.

In summary, the third wave is concerned with how to organize the language curriculum so that language is used as a resource for meaning-making in contexts of use that engage learners in complex and cognitively challenging ways. Working with genre and texts prepares students to participate in contexts of use. Using content and projects takes advantage of the classroom and its technological extension as a natural context of use for investigation and research of subject matter.

1	Syntax/ grammar	Morphology/ vocabulary	Phonology/ pronunciation	Topics/ Situations
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2	Functions	Strategies		Tasks
	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
3	Genre	Text	Content	project

Table 1: Three waves of curriculum content

Making principled choices

Different ways of conceptualizing language as curriculum content depicted in Table 1 represent understandings of language and how languages are learned based on research and theory in applied linguistics and related fields. In that sense, they are theoretical understandings of content. In practical terms, curriculum and course designers draw from different elements of these syllabuses when designing a course or program. In this sense there are a great many possibilities for curriculum content.

Mickan (2013), however, cautions that the proliferation of elements has created a problem of cumulative overload in language curriculum design.

There has been a continuing re-appraisal of what it is to teach a language, and in that process there has been a reluctance to give up previous conceptions of language. This is exhibited in the retention of grammar as a measure of language acquisition.

In order to compensate for shortcomings in the description of language in structural terms, the models have added elements to the curriculum in a cumulative process. To syntax and lexis have been added ... functions and notions, learners' roles and identities, communicative activities and tasks, composing strategies and learning strategies, and discourse features of text. (p. 24)

He argues that the proliferation is caused by dichotomies in curriculum that treat language as separate from its social contexts of use. These dichotomies include the separation of form from function, language from culture, as well as the separation of the four macro-skills. He proposes the use of texts as the organizing or unifying principle for a curriculum.

While there are a variety of possibilities, what is actually in the curriculum plan depends on the realities of the context and the learners. How these elements are combined depends on who the students are, the context in which they are learning, and their purposes for learning. Curriculum design requires principled choices. These choices are guided by the various processes of curriculum planning.

CURRICULUM PLANNING PROCESSES

Curriculum planning involves a set of processes that operate at the program level or at the individual course level. The aim is to develop a plan for learning that is effective and realistic in enabling learners to meet the desired goals. Different curriculum specialists have labeled these processes in different ways (e.g. Richards 2001, Nation & Macalister 2010). For the purposes of this chapter, we will discuss the following:

- Stating guiding principles

- Analyzing contextual factors
- Assessing learner needs
- Defining aims, goals or outcomes
- Deciding the scope and sequence
- Planning assessments and evaluation

While the processes appear as a sequence, in practice they overlap and mutually influence each other.

There are two major differences between planning at the program versus planning at the course level. The first is scale. At the program level, ranging from national curricula to institutional curricula, planning is aimed at designing a curriculum for different levels and, perhaps, different needs, over a span of time. At the course level, planning is aimed at designing a single course. The second, related to scale, is one of alignment among the various processes and communication among those who participate in them. Scale will be addressed with each process, alignment will be taken up in the discussion of issues in implementation.

Stating guiding principles or rationale

A statement of principles outlines the understanding of language, of learning and of learners on which the curriculum or course is based. These principles should derive from theories of language, research on learning, and on how languages are learned, and be clearly linked to learning in the classroom. Nation and Macalister caution that “There is a tendency for this connection not to be made, with the result that curriculum design and therefore learners do not benefit from developments in knowledge gained from research.” (2012: 6). Stating principles helps to shape the overall aims and specific objectives of the curriculum, and guide decisions about the content, process and assessment of learning.

The developers of a content-based primary school program for learners of English as an additional language in Australia describe three principles that underpin it:

1. ...cognitively complex, interdisciplinary, grade-level activities enhance the acquisition of academic language (Thomas & Collier 1997).
2. ... effective content-based second language acquisition requires abundant opportunities for communicative interaction with proficient speakers of the target language.”
3. ... we do not assume that students will simply pick up the language they need through immersion tasks demanding interaction with proficient English speakers. ... We consider it necessary to scaffold academic English proficiency in content area instruction.”
(Dooley et al. pp 127-128)

The principles address language--academic English proficiency in content areas; language learning --abundant opportunities with proficient speakers, scaffolded instruction; learning and the learners--as capable of cognitively complex, interdisciplinary, grade-appropriate activities. The designers have also cited research as an influence in their statement of principles.

Principles are context-dependent in the sense that they guide a particular curriculum or course for a particular group of learners in a particular context.

Analyzing the context—identifying resources and constraints

Context analysis, also called situational analysis (Brown 1995, Richards 2001) and environment analysis (Nation & Macalister 2012), involves identifying factors in the environment, both the resources and constraints, that will have an impact on the curriculum. This process, along with learner needs assessment, is critical to creating a realistic plan and thus supporting successful enactment of the curriculum. Factors to consider include:

- Human resources, including teachers and administration/support staff
- Physical resources, including materials, technology, space
- The educational environment: fit with other courses, examinations.
- Social, cultural and political factors and related stakeholders
- Time

Once factors have been identified, decisions must be made about which factors will have the most impact and how they will be taken into account in the design of the curriculum.

Assessing learner needs

Needs assessment, also called needs analysis, involves gathering two kinds of information: about learners at the start of a program or course, and about possible or expected final outcomes. This information is then analyzed to determine needs so that the curriculum can be designed to bridge the gap. An important consideration in needs assessment is whether and what type of target needs learners have. Target needs are related to where, with whom, why, and how the learners are expected to use the language. Analysis of these needs enables the designer to choose tasks, texts and content the learners will read, listen to, produce, or learn.

A course developer of a business English program in Australia describes the process:

To establish the aims and objectives, we engaged in a target situation analysis. We reviewed DEFS staff's course notes to give us an idea of the text types learners would need to master. We listed the types of texts that they would encounter and the types of assignments they would be expected to produce once they became university students. We then analyzed the assignments produced by previous international students to pinpoint the areas where they seemed to be having difficulties. (Agosti 2006:103)

As discussed earlier, one issue in the field of ELT is that learners do not always have identifiable target needs. Regardless of the context, information about the learners' background, language proficiency, interests and purposes for studying will help the designer to shape a curriculum that is at the appropriate language level, targets topics and materials that will interest them, employs approaches to learning that are appropriate to their cultural background, age, and so on.

At the course level, as most teachers do not meet their students until they start teaching them, they must rely on available information as well as previous experience they may have with such students. Needs assessment with

the actual learners can be done in the initial stages of the course to gather or confirm information about learners’ background, interests, learning preferences, target needs and so on (Graves 2000).

Defining goals

Goals, also called aims (Richards 2001) and objectives (Brown 1995), state what learners are expected to achieve by the end of the course or course of study. Goals can be further broken down in order to aid course developers and teachers to develop a plan for instruction.

The goals and objectives in Table 2 are for Japanese high school students in a state school. They are part of a syllabus that was given to the students at the start of the school year with the aim of giving them concrete goals from the beginning.

Writing Year 2

Goals

Improve communication skills (focus on speaking and writing skills)

Develop awareness about language learning

Objectives

Enable students to have 3-minute conversations about daily topics

Enable students to write 15 sentences about daily topics

Enable students to be autonomous learners through peer editing, self-assessment, and portfolio assessment

Writing Year 3

Goals

Improve communication skills (focus on speaking and writing skills)

Develop awareness about language learning

Objectives

Enable students to have 4-minute conversations about social topics

Enable students to write a five-paragraph essay about social topics

Enable students to think logically and express opinion in a debate

Enable students to be autonomous learners through peer editing, self-assessment, and portfolio assessment

Table 2: Goals and objectives for two levels of writing in a Japanese high school (Sato & Takashi 2008).

Table 3 shows goals for a different program: an integrated skills program at a Turkish university. The expected outcomes for 3rd year (Level 3) students address reading, writing, listening and speaking. There is an overall outcome for each of the skills. Each skill is further broken down into goals, which in turn are further broken down into objectives.

Overall reading outcome for Level 3

Students are expected to read and understand various factual and scientific articles and magazine and newspaper texts of 500-600 words and use various reading strategies effectively.

Goals for reading

- The students will be able to:
- read and summarize a text
- be aware of the process of pre-, while and postreading
- develop appropriate reading strategies
- read and comprehend texts and semi-technical texts
- read to support ideas
- read to learn technical terms

Objectives for reading

- The students will be able to:
- understand grammatical items in context
- guess the meaning of vocabulary in texts
- increase vocabulary knowledge
- read for the gist
- outline a reading text
- do decision-making tasks
- scan for specific information
- skim for the main idea

read for pleasure	paraphrase texts read up-to-date materials relevant to their field read nonverbal information e.g. tables, graphs
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Table 3. Outcome, goals and objectives for reading at a Turkish university (Kirkgoz 2007)

Defining goals and objectives provides both a basis for planning instruction and also for planning both formative and summative assessments.

Deciding the scope and sequence of the program or the course

Deciding the scope and sequence of the program or course involves decisions about what should be taught and how it will be organized. At the course level this also involves decisions about materials and methods.

Decisions about program or course content depend on the goals of the program or course, which, in turn, depend on learners' needs, contextual factors, and guiding principles. The goals are one way of defining content, as can be seen in Table 3, which outlines what students will do and learn with respect to reading. Deciding the actual scope of the content and its sequence shows how the content is learned in real time.

At the program level, decisions are made about what should be taught over the entire span of the program, how the content will be divided (e.g. into courses) and what should be emphasized in each course. Decisions are also made about how the courses will complement or build on each other and how they will be leveled and sequenced. In effect, the program needs to be organized from two perspectives: the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical shows how different courses for one level or group of students complement each other. The horizontal shows how courses are leveled and sequenced and how they build on each other over time. Table 4 illustrates a US university ESL preparation program for undergraduates:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Writing 1	Writing From Sources	Writing from authentic	Writing from academic sources
Reading 1	Reading II	Reading Authentic Text	Reading From Academic Sources
Integrated Skills	Integrated Skills	Comprehending Academic Discourse	Comprehending Lecture Discourse
Cross-Culture Talk	Cross-Culture Talk	Spoken Discourse and Cultural Communication	Academic Discourse
Topics in ESL I&II	Topics in ESL I&II	Topics in ESL III	Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Table 4. IELI curriculum (Rawley & Roemer 2007 p. 93)

The vertical curriculum shows the scope of the program and what it emphasizes: writing, reading, integrated skills, cross cultural communication, and content-based courses. Except for the content-based courses (Topics in ESL), the horizontal curriculum shows the progression of each of these components throughout the program. For example, writing progresses to an increasingly academic focus.

The processes are similar at the course level, but on a different scale. Decision are made about the following in a way that fits the time frame of the course

- what should be taught over the span of the course, e.g. which macro skills, content, genres, grammar, vocabulary, and so on.
- how the content will be divided into modules or units of work and what they are organized around, e.g. specific themes or topics, projects, types of texts.
- how the units of work will be sequenced so that they build on each other (or are independent), and how the elements within the units will be interwoven.

For example, one of the content-based courses offered in the program described in Table 4 is Written Communication for International Business Managers. Students work in teams to form an imaginary company, choose a product and do market research for it. The course combines content (advertising, sales and marketing), discipline-specific vocabulary, writing business genres, as well as Internet and library research on their topic. The sequence of the course is governed by the steps in choosing the company, designing a logo, choosing a product and so on (Rawley & Roemer 2007.)

Planning assessments and evaluation

Language assessments document student learning, for both formative and summative purposes, through tests and other instruments such as portfolios and performance assessments (Katz 2014). Evaluation documents the effectiveness of the course or program. Programs engage in different types of language assessments for different purposes: for placement purposes, for diagnostic purposes, for achievement purposes, for exit from/entry to other levels. Planning for these assessments is a crucial feature of curriculum design. Program evaluation is also an important part of curriculum planning, as the information gathered in the evaluation about the effectiveness of the program has an impact on its sustainability and relevance.

One planning decision is the extent to which in-class assessments and course evaluations should be standardized across courses. This, in turn, has an effect on course assessment and evaluation. For example, an EAP program in Canada found that separate exit tests used to progress to higher levels were too onerous for both students and teachers, and so integrated them into course final exams. Course objectives and assessment measures were standardized across levels and brought in line with Canadian Language Benchmarks. (Royal, White and McIntosh 2007.)

At the course level, types of assessment reflect the type of content. A course that focuses on language as a body of knowledge to be mastered will use more conventional assessment instruments such as so-called paper and pencil tests. A course that focuses on oral communication will use assessment instruments such as oral interviews. A course that focuses on genre will use assessment instruments that document the learners' ability to produce the appropriate genres.

An effective curriculum or course design is one in which the designers have defined goals that are realistic for learners, realistic because they can be achieved with the resources and within the constraints of the context and because they take into account learners' current abilities and future needs; in which designers have chosen content and a sequence that enables learners to reach the goals; in which designers have planned for assessments that will provide formative support toward the goals, and summative information about how well the goals have been achieved; and in which designers have planned for evaluations that will provide input into future planning.

Why do curriculum plans not work in practice?

As stated earlier, designing a program and designing a course are different because of scale and the potential for misalignment between the processes. Scale has, to some extent, been addressed in the preceding sections. Misalignment will be addressed here. In his groundbreaking edited volume on curriculum in second language teaching, R. K. Johnson (1989) used the term 'specialist' approach to describe cascading curriculum design processes in which each process was undertaken by a different group, the results handed onto the next group until they finally reached the teacher and learners. He argued that this was, essentially, a recipe for curriculum incoherence. In order to have a coherent curriculum, these processes needed to be aligned with overlapping actors at each stage. Misalignment occurs when there is a disconnect between two or more of the processes/products (e.g. policy, goals, materials, assessment) and those who carry them out. The greater the disconnect, the greater the potential for misalignment. Conversely, the closer the connection between the processes and those who carry them out, the greater the potential for alignment among the processes. Misalignment is one of the main reasons that plans do not match realities. Some examples of common misalignment:

Misalignment between *principles* and *goals* on the one hand, and the *context* and *learner needs* on the other. Too often, those who develop guiding principles and program goals, or program content and assessments design a curriculum that does not take into account or ignores contextual factors such as availability of materials, teacher experience, or amount of time; or learner factors such as proficiency level and educational background. In effect, the designers state principles (or policy) and determine goals, without undertaking a context analysis or needs analysis.

Misalignment between program *content* and *student needs*.

One common issue is that program content and materials are at a proficiency level that is beyond the learners' capacity. The program is 'aspirational' rather than realistic for the learners. The designers of a program for Burmese adults comment on such a case:

Many teachers and educational decision-makers had strong opinions about the levels their students should be studying which were at variance with the target students' proficiencies indicated on diagnostic testing. Some examples of views expressed:

Students who have finished 10th standard should be studying at upper intermediate level.

We need international level English so students can get into universities.

Julian and Foster (2013: 32).

The content may also be inappropriate for the learners' backgrounds and communicative needs. For example, a program coordinator writes about a curriculum renewal at a university in Korea:

Envisioning a curriculum that was less grammar dominated than the syllabi sometimes prepared by individual teachers, [the coordinator] sought to mitigate the heavy influence of the standard scope and sequence of EFL textbooks that colored many instructors' perceptions of curricular possibilities. She wanted a curriculum that spoke directly to the communicative needs of students in the region... Such a program had to use content derived from the South Korean context and prepare students for global, not US, contexts. (Potts & Park 2007: 185).

Misalignment between program *content* and *teacher preparation*

At the program level, accounting for teachers' understanding and acceptance of and preparation for the curriculum is one of the single most important factors in designing for successful enactment of the curriculum. For many of these teachers, the textbook is the de facto curriculum. An Algerian secondary school teacher, for example, comments on new English textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education, [teachers] 'were not prepared enough especially to use the English textbooks that are discovered fully once facing pupils in the classroom when it is somehow too late.' (Messekher 2014: 74.)

Programs based on communicative language teaching have been difficult for teachers in schools to teach because it presupposes a familiarity with sociocultural norms that the teachers, who have never participated in these contexts, do not have. Moreover, the teacher's expected role may be at odds with their beliefs and expertise (Humphries 2014).

Misalignment between *goals* and intended outcomes and *assessments*

At both the program level and at the course level, external assessments may be inappropriate for the content of the program or course. For example, Sato and Takahashi (2008) describe the situation in a high school in Japan:

The overall objectives of the [Ministry] guidelines were 'to develop students' practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker's or writer's intentions...' Although the guidelines required teaching Oral Communication twice a week to 1st year students, most teachers had been

replacing it with a grammar class as they thought grammar was essential to prepare students for university entrance exams. (p. 206)

The potential for negative washback from assessments needs to be taken into account in the curriculum planning process.

These misalignments describe disconnects between the design process and those for whom the design is intended: teachers and learners. While curriculum design should be underpinned by research and theory, it is aimed at practice—the curriculum enacted in the classroom by teacher and learners. This does not mean that curriculum should be designed for the status quo; it means that teachers need to be brought into the process in ways that respect their expertise and potential.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Backward design (Wiggins and McTighe 2005) is a popular approach to curriculum development in the United States. In this approach, the curriculum designer begins with essential questions the curriculum is designed to address, followed by a definition of ultimate outcomes the learners will achieve. Potential evidence for those outcomes is then determined. The designer then works ‘backward’ from the outcomes and evidence to decide the kinds of learning experiences the learners will have that will enable them to provide evidence of meeting the outcomes. If we apply this design at a meta-level to language curriculum design, the outcomes of language curriculum can only be evident in the classroom and beyond. For this reason, it makes sense to start from the classroom and the people in it in order to make viable decisions.

The third wave curriculum places great demands on teachers-- an understanding of how to work with subject matter, a clear understanding of how texts and genres are constructed, or the ability to guide, monitor and evaluate project work. Teacher preparation that focuses on meeting these demands is key, as well as teacher networking to share approaches and materials. Without teacher preparation this type of curriculum may have limited relevance.

For many students, technology already plays an important role in language learning outside of the classroom as they use it to participate in cross-linguistic communities and to access and co-construct knowledge. The question is to what extent its use will be purposefully designed into the curriculum.

Finally, the question of *whose* English is being taught in the English language curriculum is one that will need to be addressed at the curricular level.

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Discussion questions:

To come

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