Part II

Planning and organising ELT
Curriculum, resources and settings
Language curriculum design
Possibilities and realities

Kathleen Graves

Introduction

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. Curriculum content in language teaching is often described in terms of different kinds of syllabuses (e.g. notional/functional, task-based and so forth; see, for example, Thornbury, and Van den Branden, this volume). This chapter takes a different approach by describing three historical, overlapping waves of curriculum content that have their basis in different understandings of language and how and why people learn a language. Curriculum content must also be appropriate for the context in which it is enacted, hence the importance of having integrated planning processes. If the processes do not align, the curriculum may not be effective in its intended context.

Definitions: curriculum and syllabus

Curriculum and syllabus are both concerned with the same question: what students learn. The purpose of curriculum and syllabus design, therefore, is to determine what students will learn and to outline a plan for how they will learn it. Although there are regional differences in the way these terms are sometimes used (between, for example, the UK and the USA), for the purposes of this chapter, curriculum is the superordinate term and syllabus a subordinate term. Richards 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.

(2013: 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. Theorists in general education suggest that there are multiple dimensions of curriculum, which include, according to Ylimaki (2013), the intended, the enacted, the assessed, the learned 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, and the learned curriculum is 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 (Apple, 2004). For example, when immigrant students are taught about housekeeping and warehouse jobs rather than how to prepare for a career, the curriculum implies that they are only capable of the former, not the latter.

I suggest that a curriculum is the dynamic interplay of three interconnected processes: planning, enacting and evaluating. In this view, a curriculum is not just a design for learning, it is also the learning itself; it is both the plan and the enactment. The enacted curriculum is what happens in the classroom among learners and teacher – without enactment, the curriculum plan is just an artefact (Graves, 2008). Ideally, enactment is informed and guided by the design and made more effective as a result of both formative and summative 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.

Three waves of language curriculum

Despite how it is often perceived, language is not of itself an educational subject; it is 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 (SLA), and has been shaped 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 wave, the communicative wave and the third wave. While they are in some ways chronological, there is considerable overlap among them, and they are each still very much in play today. Each wave carries some of what came before, and all draw from the same ocean.

First wave: the linguistic wave

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 mastery. In this view, all learners who are taught the curriculum are meant to master the same body of knowledge. The particular learners and their needs are 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
Language curriculum design

or situational vocabulary. Language teaching materials for such a curriculum are usually organised around situational dialogues that include the target grammar and vocabulary, as well as grammar and pronunciation exercises. For example, a unit might focus on simple present tense, adverbs of frequency and the question how often, coupled with the topic of daily or weekly routines.

Second wave: the communicative wave

Developments in sociolinguistics in the 1970s and ’80s brought about a major shift in understandings of language, ultimately leading to the development of a ‘communicative approach’ to language teaching (see Thornbury, this volume). Rather than a set of components to be combined and mastered, language was defined as socially situated communication in which appropriate use depended on the ability to speak, write, read and understand the language for different purposes in a 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). Canale’s model of communicative competence (1983), which included linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competence, became an influential framework. Analyzing learners’ needs and contexts for using language entered curriculum thinking. This type of needs analysis was most highly developed in early work on English for specific purposes (Munby, 1978; see Starfield, this volume).

Thus, the notion of language proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening for communication gained traction, and they became the building blocks of the communicative curriculum. Research into the skills, and their subskills and underlying processes, began to emerge (e.g. Omaggio, 1986). Learning strategies, which can be defined as behaviours or thinking processes that students use to enhance their learning, also became a component of curriculum content. Taxonomies of strategies were developed, for example by Oxford (1990) and O’Malley and Chamot (1990), that included, among other things, cognitive strategies such as making predictions based on the topic of a text and metacognitive strategies such as setting learning goals.

Research in the 1970s and ’80s in the fledgling field of SLA 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’ has been defined and interpreted in different ways and has evolved in meaning from the early 1980s (Richards, 2013). In communicative language teaching, tasks are meant to mirror those that learners will be expected to perform outside the classroom, for example, ordering from a menu or completing a job application. In this second wave of curriculum content, therefore, tasks focus on communicative processes rather than mastery of specific linguistic content. Tasks are a-linguistic in the sense that how learners accomplish them depends on their using whatever linguistic resources are available rather than being constructed or defined by certain language choices. (See Van den Branden, this volume, for further discussion of task-based learning and teaching.)

The communicative wave thus introduced functions, strategies, the four individual macro skills 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’. Although communicative competence is based on an understanding of language as context-dependent, somewhat paradoxically descriptions of it tend to be a-contextual in the sense that they describe generic abilities in the four macro skills. For example, in the Council of Europe
Frame of Reference (CEFR), 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).

(2001: 24)

The descriptor is aimed at all learners and does not take into account actual contexts of use. Leung (2012: 165, cited in Richards, 2013: 27) points out:

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.

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 also highlights an important feature of the complexity of language curriculum design – that the content can vary markedly depending on who the learners are, their purposes for learning and the contexts in which they are learning. One factor in that complexity is whether the students have immediate, identifiable needs for the language in or outside of the classroom. In other words, are they preparing to participate or do they 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, at an increasingly younger age. It also includes 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; or 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 views language as a resource for meaning-making contingent on a context of use. The curriculum is organised around genre, texts, content and/or projects, each of which has 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; as Paltridge points out, “Genres, in this view, both respond and contribute to the constitution of social contexts, as well as the socialisation of individuals” (2014: 303). In the 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 (see also Basturkmen and Wette, and Starfield, this volume).

Text as curriculum content is closely related to genre, and the two are often used interchangeably. According to Mickan, 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” (2013: 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 systemic functional linguistics (e.g. Halliday, 1975). 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, Mickan (2013: 64–65) describes a programme for migrant students in a secondary school science class who learn to participate in science practices through literacy events and lab work. 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 Mickan, the content is science. In a curriculum based on content (known as CBI or content-based instruction in US ELT and CLIL or content and language integrated learning in European ELT; see Morton, this volume), the subject matter determines the instructional texts and the kinds of tasks learners do. They investigate and demonstrate learning of the content, while also learning the language needed to understand it.

According to Ioannou-Georgiou, 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.

(2012: 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. socialising, 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, as in the second wave curriculum described earlier, in which learners might roleplay ordering food in a restaurant 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 involve ongoing exploration and activity and usually result in a product of some kind, such as a research report, a performance or a presentation (Beckett, 2006). For example, a teacher in Thailand (Knox, 2007) designed a course based on two student projects. The first involved planning and conducting group interviews with departing tourists at the airport about their experience in Thailand, followed by a presentation based on the interviews. The second involved organising a group tour of a temple. The projects combined work on language in preparation 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 and provide means for authentic interactions and collaboration, as well as self-directed learning (Maggi et al., 2014). Since 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 (see Gruba, Hinkelman and Cárdenas–Claras, this volume).

In summary, the third wave is concerned with how to organise 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. It should be noted that for school-age learners in countries like the US, Canada and Australia, the learning of content is a given, not a choice.

Table 6.1 summarises the three waves of curriculum according to curriculum content, the processes for learning content, and the role of student needs and context.

**Making principled choices**

Different ways of conceptualising language as curriculum content depicted in Table 6.1 represent understandings of language and how languages are learned based on research and theory in
Language curriculum design

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 programme. In this sense, there are a great many possibilities for curriculum content.

Mickan, however, cautions that the proliferation of elements has created a problem of cumulative overload in language curriculum design, noting that:

(1) 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.

(2) 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.

(Mickan, 2013: 24)

The proliferation of elements underscores a central challenge of language curriculum design: how to make principled choices among the elements. These choices depend on both a theoretical stance and a practical understanding of who the students are, the context in which they are learning and their purposes for learning. These choices are guided by the various processes of curriculum planning, the subject of the next section.

Curriculum planning processes

Curriculum planning involves a set of decisions that operate at the programme 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 labelled these processes in different ways (e.g. Richards, 2001; Nation and Macalister, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter, we will discuss the following:

- Stating guiding principles
- Analyzing contextual factors
- Assessing learner needs
- Determining aims, goals or objectives

Table 6.1 The three waves of language curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First wave: linguistic</td>
<td>Language as a unified body of interrelated systems of linguistic knowledge, learned as sentence-level patterns which may be topic-based, by all learners irrespective of needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second wave: communicative</td>
<td>Language as communication for various purposes and contexts, learned through interactions or tasks using the four macro-skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third wave</td>
<td>Language as contingent on particular content, social practices (genre/text) or projects, learned and used as a means to learn content, participate in practices or accomplish projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kathleen Graves

- 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 programme versus planning at the course level. The first is scale. At the programme 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, influenced by scale, is one of alignment among the various processes and communication among those who participate in them. In the discussion that follows, 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, and 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” (2010: 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.

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. For example, the principle below is from the US Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education curriculum framework for adult learners:

Principle 5: Language learning requires risk-taking. Adult learners will benefit from a classroom community that supports them in taking risks in authentic communication practice.

*(Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005)*

It is based on an understanding of the needs of adult learners and contributes to a common platform for administrators, materials developers and teachers as they support, design and enact curriculum.

**Analyzing contextual factors**

Context analysis, also called situational analysis and environment analysis, 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 administrative/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 programme or course and about possible or expected final outcomes. This information is then analysed 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 programme 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 and 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 other, similar concerns (Graves, 2000).

**Determining goals, aims or objectives**

Goals, aims and objectives are near-synonyms and thus are often used interchangeably. Aims and goals are generally broader and state what learners are expected to achieve by the end of the course or programme of study. Objectives are generally more specific descriptions of what students need to know or be able to do in order to achieve the goals; thus objectives ‘unpack’ the goals.

Table 6.2 describes the third year reading component of a three level integrated skills programme at a Turkish university. It shows a three-part structure: the overall expected outcomes related to types and lengths of text and use of strategies; how these are broken down into goals that will enable them to achieve the outcomes; and specific objectives that will enable them to achieve the goals.

Goals and objectives provide a basis for planning instruction as well as for planning both formative and summative assessments. They can be aligned with national or transnational outcomes frameworks such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) or the Canadian Language Benchmarks.
Deciding the scope and sequence of the programme or the course

Deciding the scope and sequence of the programme or course involves decisions about what should be taught and how it will be organised. At the course level, this also involves decisions about materials and methods. Decisions about programme or course content depend on the goals of the programme 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 6.2, 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 programme level, decisions are made about what should be taught over the entire span of the programme: how the content will be divided (e.g. into courses); what should be emphasised in each course; how the courses will complement or build on each other; and how they will be levelled and sequenced. In effect, the programme needs to be organised from a vertical perspective, i.e. how different courses for one level or group of students complement each other, and from a horizontal perspective, i.e. how courses are levelled and sequenced, and how they build on each other over time. Table 6.3 illustrates a US university ESL preparation programme for undergraduates.

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

The processes are similar at the course level, but on a different scale. Decisions 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 etc.
Language curriculum design

Table 6.3 IELI curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PROGRESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing I</td>
<td>Writing from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading I</td>
<td>Reading II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated skills</td>
<td>Integrated skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-culture talk</td>
<td>Cross-culture talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics in ESL I &amp; II</td>
<td>Topics in ESL I &amp; II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Rawley and Roemer, 2007: 93. Reproduced with permission.

- **how the content will be divided** into modules or units of work and what they are organised 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, in ‘Written communication for international business managers’ (one of the Topics in ESL III shown in Table 6.3), 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 units of work are based on the steps of choosing the company, designing a logo, choosing a product and so forth (Rawley and 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. Evaluation documents the effectiveness of a course or programme. Programmes 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. Planning programme evaluations is also an important part of curriculum design, as the information gathered in an evaluation about the effectiveness of the programme has an impact on its sustainability and relevance.

A key planning decision is the extent to which in-class assessments and course evaluations should be standardised across courses. This, in turn, has an effect on course assessment and evaluation. For example, an EAP programme 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 standardised across levels and brought in line with Canadian Language Benchmarks (Royal et al., 2007).
At the course level, types of assessment reflect the type of content. A course that focuses on language as 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 may use assessment instruments such as oral interviews. A course that focuses on mastering written genres may use assessment instruments such as rubrics.

In summary, an effective curriculum or course design is one in which the designers have:

- made explicit the educational principles that underlie the curriculum;
- defined goals that are realistic for learners and account for their current abilities and future needs and are achievable with the resources and within the constraints of the context;
- chosen content and a sequence that enables learners to reach the goals;
- planned for assessments that will provide formative support toward the goals and summative information about how well the goals have been achieved;
- developed evaluations that will provide input into future iterations of the curriculum.

**Why do curriculum plans often not work in practice?**

As stated earlier, designing a programme and designing a course are different because of scale and the potential for misalignment between the processes. Scale has been addressed in the preceding sections by contrasting programme and course decisions. Misalignment will be addressed here. In his edited volume on curriculum in second language teaching, Johnson (1989) uses the term ‘specialist’ approach to describe cascading curriculum design processes in which each process is undertaken by a different group, with the results handed on to the next group until they finally reach the teacher and learners. He argues that this is, essentially, a recipe for curriculum incoherence. In order to have a coherent curriculum, these processes need 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. We shall now look at some common examples of 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 programme goals 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 programme content and student needs**

Programme content and materials are often at a proficiency level that is beyond the learners’ capacity. The programme is ‘aspirational’ rather than realistic for the learners. The designers of a programme for Burmese adults describe such a gap, where teachers and educational decision-makers wanted the programme targeted at an upper intermediate or pre-university level, which
Language curriculum design was greatly at odds with the target students’ proficiencies indicated on diagnostic testing (Julian and Foster, 2013).

The content may also be inappropriate for the learners’ backgrounds and communicative needs. For example, an activity from a coursebook chosen to fulfill the government mandated communicative curriculum in Albanian secondary schools asked students to describe an accident while traveling abroad. However, as one teacher explained, “Most of them have neither been abroad nor witnessed an accident” (Seferaj, 2014: 98).

**Misalignment between programme content and teacher preparation**

At the programme level, accounting for or supporting 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* syllabus. Programmes 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 (Humphries, 2014). Moreover, the teachers’ expected role may be at odds with their beliefs and expertise.

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

At both the programme level and at the course level, external assessments may be inappropriate for the content of the programme or course. In Japan, for example, government guidelines to teach language for communication in secondary schools are at odds with university entrance exams, which place a heavy emphasis on grammar and lexical knowledge (Sato and Takahashi, 2008). Thus 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 develop their potential.

**Future directions**

Future directions for the language curriculum revolve around third wave developments and the impact of technology. As English continues to grow as the global lingua franca for knowledge construction and dissemination, the third wave will continue to expand through curricula based on content, projects and social practices. In these curricula, learners use language as *a means* (e.g. to do research, to explore content, to solve problems), rather than as an *end in itself* (e.g. to learn vocabulary and dialogues). They draw on the learners’ cognitive capacities in ways that allow them to learn challenging content, to work collaboratively and to direct their learning.

The expanded use of technology will continue to affect language curricula, both in terms of content and interactivity. It has become the source of materials for many third wave curricula, supplanting the traditional language textbook, which is an artefact of the first and second waves. By providing platforms for individual and collaborative learning both within and outside the classroom, it greatly expands opportunities for students to use language as a means to learn content and (co)construct knowledge.
Expansion of the third wave and the enrichment of curriculum content and learning processes through technology will not be possible, however, unless teachers are supported in learning to teach language through content, to guide, monitor and evaluate project work, to understand the relationship between text and context, and to incorporate technology in their work. This kind of support, in turn, can only happen when those who prepare teachers are themselves able to teach in ways that are consistent with these approaches, e.g. having teacher candidates unpack the relationship between text and context, engage in problem solving or connect through technology as they learn how to teach. Ideally, practicing teachers and teacher-educators would collaborate in the design of language curricula, research how they are enacted, evaluate their effectiveness and use the results of evaluation to both improve teacher education and language teaching and, ultimately, student learning.

Discussion questions

• Consider the language curriculum for a context you are familiar with. In what way does it draw upon first, second and third wave curriculum elements?
• Have you experienced incidents of curriculum misalignment and disconnect? What were the implications for subsequent teaching and learning? How were the misalignments addressed?
• What role do you think teachers should play in curriculum development?

Related topics

Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Content and language integrated learning; English for academic purposes; English for specific purposes; New technologies, blended learning and the ‘flipped classroom’; Task-based language teaching.

Further reading


References


