2 A framework of course development processes

Kathleen Graves

Curriculum design specialists have developed various frameworks that break down the process of curriculum and course development into components and subprocesses (see, for example, Dubin and Olshoain 1986; Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Johnson 1989; Nunan 1985, 1988a, 1988b; Richards 1990; White 1988). A framework of components is useful for several reasons: It provides an organized way of conceiving of a complex process; it sets forth domains of inquiry for the teacher, in that each component puts forth ideas as well as raises issues for the teacher to pursue; it provides a set of terms currently used in talking about course development and thus a common professional vocabulary and access to the ideas of others. The framework described here, while drawing on the work of others, is cast in terms of my own work with teachers. It is not a framework of equal parts: Each individual’s context determines which processes need the most time and attention. Furthermore, the processes are not necessarily sequential but may be carried on in the planning, teaching, and replanning stages of course development.

In Table 1, each component is identified and rephrased in question form to clarify its meaning.

### Table 1 Framework components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs assessment</td>
<td>What are my students’ needs? How can I assess them so that I can address them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining goals and objectives</td>
<td>What are the purposes and intended outcomes of the course? What will my students need to do or learn to achieve these goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizing content</td>
<td>What will be the backbone of what I teach? What will I include in my syllabus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting and developing materials and activities</td>
<td>How and with what will I teach the course? What is my role? What are my students’ roles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of content and activities</td>
<td>How will I organize the content and activities? What systems will I develop?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>How will I assess what students have learned? How will I assess the effectiveness of the course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of resources and constraints</td>
<td>What are the givens of my situation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

address them effectively. However, how one defines a student’s needs is a complex issue open to interpretation. One way of conceptualizing needs is to distinguish between “objective” and “subjective” needs (Richterich 1980. Brindley (1989: 70) defines objective needs as “derivable from different kinds of factual information about learners, their use of language in real-life communication situations as well as their current language proficiency and language difficulties” and subjective needs as “the cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners’ wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies.”

In assessing objective needs, one can include information about students’ backgrounds — country and culture, education, family, profession, age, languages spoken, and so on; students’ abilities or proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English; and students’ needs with respect to how they will use or deal with English outside of the classroom. In assessing subjective needs, one can include information about students’ attitudes toward the target language and culture, toward learning, and toward themselves as learners; students’ expectations of themselves and of the course; students’ underlying purposes — or lack thereof — in studying English; and students’ preferences with respect to how they will learn.
Different students have different needs, and the information gathered through needs assessment can help a teacher make choices as to what to teach and how to teach it. For example, students who wish to attend universities in English-speaking countries will have needs related to academic tasks and academic discourse. Objective information about their prior experience in academic settings, their level of English, and their field of study can contribute to the teacher’s decisions about her course. Their subjective needs may be related to concerns about adjusting to the university setting and to a new culture, their level of self-confidence, or their expectations regarding what and how they will be taught. Subjective needs are often as important as objective needs. Teachers may find, as Johan Uvin (Chapter 3) did in his course for Chinese health-care workers, that unless subjective needs are taken into account, objective needs may not be met.

Who provides information about needs? Who determines the needs? A needs assessment can include input from students as well as from the various people connected to the course, such as teachers, funders, parents, administration, and employers. In a university ESL setting, for example, information from the students’ future professors regarding what the students will be expected to read, research, and present can help the teacher shape her course (Tarone and Yule 1989). Teachers may have to work with a conception of needs determined by their institution or other party and conduct their assessment accordingly. The students’ needs in Uvin’s workplace ESOL course were initially defined by the institution as the language and behavior needed for the workers to function in their work setting.

When does one conduct a needs assessment? Depending on one’s context, needs assessment can be conducted in stage 1, the planning stage; in stage 2, the teaching stage; and also in stage 3, the replanning stage, if one determines that the assessment must be modified in some way. Teachers who have contact with their students prior to teaching the course can undertake a precourse needs assessment. In many cases, however, a formal precourse needs assessment is neither necessary nor appropriate. Some teachers are able to make fairly accurate assumptions about their students’ needs with respect to the course on the basis of prior experience with the course or with those particular students. In many cases, precourse assessment is simply not feasible because the teacher does not have contact with the students until the first day of class.

Another important factor in deciding when to assess needs is the teacher’s view of the purpose of needs assessment. Needs assessment can also be a teaching tool because it can help students become more aware and more purposeful in their learning. Many teachers see it as an ongoing part of teaching, on the one hand, because it may take time to establish the kind of rapport with students that allows for a clear understanding of needs and, on the other, because they view it as a teaching tool that enables them to work in partnership with their students to determine needs and ensure that the course meets those needs.

Teachers who use needs assessment as an ongoing part of their classes develop activities that help students clarify and focus their needs. Such activities can include mindmapping (creating word maps) and student-generated questionnaires (Grant and Shank 1993). For example, in a writing class, students begin to articulate their needs based on a “mindmap” around the word writing. Teachers may use dialogue journals, discussion, or written responses to focus questions—for example, as suggested to me by Don Cherry, one’s best and worst learning experiences. Many familiar activities can be given a needs assessment focus by the teacher.

How does one conduct a needs assessment? Teachers use a variety of methods. Questionnaires are a common needs assessment tool. They can be written in English or, when appropriate and feasible, in the native language of the students. One of the challenges in designing a questionnaire is choosing questions that will be interpreted correctly and will provide the information sought, especially if one is seeking subjective data. Interviews with students and others (such as employers or professors) are another common way of finding out students’ needs. Other means include observation of or, in some cases, participation in the situations in which students will use English. Teachers may obtain samples of written materials, such as manuals or textbooks, that students will have to use. Stern (1992) cautions against gathering so much data that one cannot analyze and put it to use.

Tests and interviews that measure proficiency are also a part of needs assessment because they help determine what students already know and where they are lacking. Many institutions administer proficiency tests for placement purposes. Teachers may also design in-class activities for the first days of class that measure students’ proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, or listening.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) make a distinction between target needs (“what the learner needs to do in the target situation”) and learning needs (“what the learner needs to do in order to learn”). Needs assessment is clearly a sensible undertaking when students have target needs—real-life language needs and a context for using the language skills gained in class, as for immigrants to an English-speaking country, students studying or planning to study in English-speaking schools, or people who use English in their work. However, even when needs are clear, as with immigrants learning to function in a new culture, they may be so general that the teacher has to find ways to assess and define them so that they can be translated into realistic goals. The challenge becomes focusing the needs assessment so as to provide adequate but not overwhelming data on which to base decisions.

In other contexts—particularly, but not only, EFL contexts—teachers
face a different problem because many of their students have no target needs, no clearly anticipated use for the skills gained through study. English may be a requirement for an exit or entrance exam. It may be viewed as a subject like math or science, or it may be a social undertaking like the study of music. For these students, the notion of needs outside the classroom is tenuous. The focus of the needs assessment shifts to the learning needs or subjective needs of the students so as to increase motivation and to help students find purpose and interest in what they are doing in the course. For example, Gorsuch (1991) describes a technique for helping students in a conversation class in Japan articulate their needs and set periodic and achievable goals to meet those needs.

**Issues**

Needs assessment is not a value-free process. It is influenced by the teacher’s view of what the course is about, the institutional constraints, and the students’ perceptions of what is being asked of them. For example, one teacher of immigrants might ask them to list situations in which they use or expect to use English, with the aim of providing instruction in the language and behavior necessary to deal with those situations. Another teacher might ask the same students to articulate or enact problems they face in adjusting to the new culture, with the aim of helping them exert control over the acculturation process.

For many students, needs assessment is an unfamiliar procedure, and they may have difficulty articulating their purposes or needs. The process itself may engender uncertainty in the students, as knowing their needs is presumably the responsibility of the teacher or institution. Questions may be interpreted differently by different students or may not elicit the anticipated answers. Students’ perceptions of needs may not match those of the teacher. The teacher’s view of the students’ needs may conflict with those of the institution.

The content and method of needs assessment should be evaluated as to appropriateness and effectiveness in achieving their purpose of identifying the needs of the students. It may take several tries to develop effective needs assessment tools. Those tools should not be viewed as “one time only” processes. Needs assessment should be viewed as an ongoing process, both in its development and in its use.

**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?*

What are goals and objectives and what is the relationship between them? Goals are general statements of the overall, long-term purposes of the course. Objectives express the specific ways in which the goals will be achieved. The goals of a course represent the destination; the objectives, the various points that chart the course toward the destination. To arrive at the destination, one must pass each of these points. Let us consider the example of Chapter 4, Pat Fisher’s social studies course for seventh-grade ESOL students. Objectives permit Fisher to define her goals more precisely by breaking them down into concrete and achievable teaching and learning activities. For example, one of Fisher’s goals is to orient her students to the particular skills, vocabulary, and rhetorical styles of the social sciences.

Some of the objectives that help move the children toward that goal are for students to “be able to read maps, graphs, and charts with demonstrated understanding” and “to know the geographic, topical, and climatic features of the major regions of the Eastern Hemisphere.”

Why set goals and objectives? Setting goals and objectives provides a sense of direction and a coherent framework for the teacher in planning her course. Breaking goals down into objectives is very much like making a map of the territory to be explored. It is a way for the teacher to conceptualize her course in terms of teachable chunks. Clear goals and objectives give the teacher a basis for determining which content and activities are appropriate for her course. They also provide a framework for evaluation of the effectiveness or worth of an activity: Did it help students achieve or make progress toward the goals and objectives? Clearly, there are many routes (objectives) to a given destination, some more circuitous than others, and the length and nature of the route will depend on one’s departure point.

How does one choose appropriate goals and objectives? There is no simple answer to this question. To arrive at the goals, one asks the question, “What are the purposes and intended outcomes of the course?” The answer may be influenced by an analysis of students’ needs, the policies of the institution, and the way the teacher conceptualizes content, among other factors. Stern (1992) proposes four types of goals for language learners: proficiency goals, cognitive goals, affective goals, and transfer goals. Proficiency goals include general competency, mastery of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), or mastery of specific language behaviors. Cognitive goals include mastery of linguistic knowledge and mastery of cultural knowledge. Affective goals include achieving positive attitudes and feelings about the target language, achieving confidence as a user of the language, and achieving confidence in oneself as a learner. Transfer goals involve learning how to learn so that one can call upon learning skills gained in one situation to meet future learning challenges. Thus goals may address not only the attainment of knowledge and skills but also the development of attitude and awareness.
Goals should also be realizable. Richards (1990: 3) gives the example of a goal stated as “Students will develop favorable attitudes toward the program.” He goes on to point out, “However, while this goal might represent a sincere wish on the part of teachers, it should appear as a program goal only if it is to be addressed concretely in the program.”

The formulation of objectives provides the check as to whether the goals will be addressed. To arrive at objectives, one asks, “What do students need to learn or do to achieve these purposes?” One of the challenges in formulating objectives is thinking of objectives that are congruent with the goals and that are not so narrow that they enmesh the teacher in an unnecessary level of detail.

How does one state objectives? As Nunan (1988b: 60) has pointed out, “Objectives are really nothing more than a particular way of formulating or stating content and activities.” Thus how one conceptualizes and states objectives depends on how one conceptualizes the content of the course. Content as knowledge might be stated as “Students will know . . .,” “Students will learn the . . .,” or “Students will learn that . . .” Content as skill might be stated as “Students will be able to . . .,” “Students will know how to . . .,” or “Students will develop the ability to . . ..” Performance or behavioral objectives are most often associated with content as skill; however, this represents a narrow view as they specify terminal behavior rather than the development of skills, such as those needed to read, write, listen and speak effectively (Richards 1990). Content as attitude and awareness would be stated as “Students will be aware that . . .,” “Students will develop an awareness of . . .,” “Students will develop an attitude of . . .,” or “Students will explore their attitudes towards . . .” Objectives stated in this way can help teachers address affective aspects of learning.

The examples given suggest what students will know, know how to do, or be aware of as a result of the course. Objectives may also be stated in terms of what students will do in the course. Saphier and Gower (1987) list five kinds of objectives, all interrelated. The first three concern what students will do; the last two, what they will have mastered.

1. Coverage objectives articulate what will be covered. Example: We will cover the first five units of the course book.
2. Activity objectives articulate what the students will do. Examples: Students will write six different kinds of paragraphs. Students will do paragraph development exercises.
3. Involvement objectives articulate how to maximize student involvement and interest. Examples: Students will engage in discussions about which paragraphs they like best. Students will brainstorm lists of interesting topics to write about.

4. Mastery objectives articulate what students will be able to do as a result of their time in class. Example: Students will be able to write an interesting paragraph that contains a topic sentence and supporting details.
5. Critical thinking objectives articulate which learning skills students will develop. Example: Students will be able to determine characteristics of a good paragraph and say why they think a paragraph is good.

Tension often exists between coverage objectives and mastery objectives because the time it takes to master skills or knowledge or to develop awareness may not correspond to the time allotted in a syllabus. This tension can create dilemmas for teachers who must cover and test the material in the syllabus yet wish to ensure that students have mastered the material prior to moving on. The tension can also put teachers at odds with their students or the institution if the teacher believes that success is achieved through demonstrated mastery but the students expect coverage to mean mastery.

Issues

The main issue is that many teachers do not formulate goals and objectives at all or do so only after having thought about what they will teach and how. Studies on teacher planning underscore this fact (Clark and Peterson 1986). My own work with teachers has shown that they consider the setting of goals and objectives a valuable process but one that they find difficult to articulate and organize. They feel that they must first be clear about what they are teaching and how they view the content. They report from experience that they cannot clearly formulate their goals and objectives until after they have taught the course at least once. (Returning to the map analogy, one cannot map a route until one has traveled it.) Thus for many teachers, this is not the entry point into the process of course development.

Another issue involves clarity with respect to students’ needs. It is easier to set goals in situations where these needs are clear; otherwise, the goals of the course may shift and be redefined as the course progresses. Finally, goals and objectives are a statement of intent, subject to reexamination and change once the course is under way.

Conceptualizing content

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

When a teacher conceptualizes content, she is figuring out which aspects
of language and language learning she will include, emphasize, and integrate in her course. This is not the relatively simple process it once was. Two decades ago, language teaching was still heavily influenced by a structural view of language (Richards and Rodgers 1986). This influence resulted in a "one size fits all" approach to content and methods, meaning that, for example, an EFL teacher could use the same textbook and the same drills or pattern practice for factory workers, college students, and housewives. There was not much question about content: It was grammatical structures and vocabulary.

Much has changed in recent years in the fields of applied linguistics and language acquisition and in approaches to language teaching. The proficiency movement, the concept and various models of communicative competence, the advent of ESP (English for specific purposes), the proliferation of methods of language teaching, and the diversification of the population of English learners have all provided the teacher with many more options to consider in deciding what will be the backbone of her course (Canale 1983; Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Omaggio Hadley 1993; Richards 1990; Savignon 1983; Yalden 1987). Now the choices a teacher makes are much more context-dependent and so involve a number of factors 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. A course for immigrants in an English-speaking country will likely stress different content than a course for high school students in their own country. A course for college students on vacation in an English-speaking country will likely stress different content than a course for the same students preparing to enter a university there.

Let us look at some ways of conceptualizing and categorizing content. The boundaries between categories are permeable; they overlap conceptually and are not exclusive of each other. The teacher's challenge is to figure out which ones are appropriate for her course and how she will integrate them. They will be described and then outlined in a syllabus grid, which will be added to with each successive component. In my experience, teachers do not usually use syllabus grids to lay out the content of a course (only one teacher in this volume has done so), but a grid is a graphic way to illustrate possible categories.

The traditional way of conceptualizing content, which many teachers have experienced in their own learning of language, is as grammar structures, sentence patterns, and vocabulary. These aspects of language are relatively systematic and rule-governed and are often the basis of content found in textbooks. They include rules of word formation (morphology), rules of pronunciation (phonology), and grammatical structures and relationships among words at the sentence level (syntax). A syllabus grid that includes these aspects of language might look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
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For language teachers, the possibilities for what to include in a syllabus opened up with the advent of what has come to be called the communicative approach (Larsen-Freeman 1986). The work of sociolinguists such as Hymes (1972) and Halliday (1973, 1975) and of applied linguists such as Wilkins (1976) and Van Ek (1975) has helped reorient thinking about the nature of language. The communicative approach is based on ideas about language, on the one hand, and about the purposes of language learning, on the other. Language is used in a context, which determines and constrains the choices that language users make with respect to purpose, style, register, and topic. Learners must use the language and have purposes for using it. From the point of view of conceptualizing content, the communicative approach added several dimensions. First, it added the dimension of language functions, such as to apologize, to persuade, to convey information. It also added the dimension of notions, which form a continuum from general concepts such as time, space, and relationship to specific topic-related notions such as house and home, weather, and personal identification (Van Ek 1975). Language was seen as being used for communicative purposes in situations with other people, which call on the learner to pay attention to both the content of the language and its appropriateness with respect to formality, non-verbal behavior, tone, and so on. Communicative situations might include ordering food in a restaurant, buying stamps at the post office, extending an invitation to a social event. Thus we can add these categories to our syllabus grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Notions and topics</th>
<th>Communicative situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proficiency movement and the development of proficiency guidelines have emphasized a four-skills-based approach to syllabus design (Omaggio Hadley 1993). For some teachers, these skills are a given, as students have to use some combination of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in class. However, because becoming proficient in each of these skills entails mastery of a set of subskills and processes, many teachers choose to emphasize certain skills or find ways to integrate them. For example, to become proficient in writing, a student must learn how to structure paragraphs, how to use cohesive devices, the rhetorical styles of
written English, editing techniques and so on. Two of the teachers in this book describe courses devoted primarily to developing one skill, writing in Chapter 6 and listening in Chapter 7. Thus we can add the following categories to our syllabus grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening skills</th>
<th>Speaking skills</th>
<th>Reading skills</th>
<th>Writing skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notions and topics</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The emphasis on communicative competence as based on and brought about by interaction has prompted a view of language as not just something one learns but something one does. Thus teachers may conceive of their syllabus in terms of what the students will do in the classroom as activities or tasks. Tasks have been variously defined. Prabhu (1987: 24) defines a task as an activity that requires learners "to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought," such as deciding on an itinerary based on train timetables or composing a telegram to send to someone. Tasks have also been defined as projects in which learners work together to produce something, such as a putting together a newspaper or conducting a survey (Hutchinson 1984). Nunan (1989) proposes a task continuum, with real-world tasks at one end and pedagogic tasks at the other. Real-world tasks ask students to use language in ways that they might outside the classroom, such as listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, or using a train schedule. Pedagogic tasks are ones that would not occur outside of the classroom but help students develop skills necessary to function in that world, such as information gap activities.

The competency-based approach to syllabus design was developed in the United States in response to the influx of immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a combination of the communicative and task-based approaches and has been used in courses for teaching immigrants, who have immediate needs with respect to functioning in English in the community and in the workplace. Competencies are "task-oriented goals written in terms of behavioral objectives that include language behavior" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983: 9). They are the language and behavior necessary to function in situations related to living in the community and finding and maintaining a job. Competencies related to living in the community have also been called life-skills. Those related to jobs have been called vocational skills. (See, for example, the California ESL Model Standards for adult education 1993.)

However one defines them, tasks can be geared to one's specific group of learners. For business personnel, tasks might include giving a business presentation or writing a report; for university students, tasks might include writing a research paper or preparing a report from notes taken at a lecture. In Chapter 5, Carmen Blyth describes the development of an EAP (English for academic purposes) course for postgraduate students in which she conceptualizes content in terms of academic tasks, such as listening to lectures, and the skills necessary to carry out such tasks, such as note taking and listening for gist. We can add two other categories to our syllabus grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening skills</th>
<th>Speaking skills</th>
<th>Reading skills</th>
<th>Writing skills</th>
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</table>

The role of culture in language learning is receiving increasing attention. Culture provides a broader and deeper context for how one knows or determines what is valued, appropriate, or even feasible and why. Damen (1986) calls culture the "fifth dimension of language teaching." Kramsch (1993) asserts that culture is not just a fifth skill or even an aspect of communicative competence but the underlying dimension of all one knows and does. One teacher, Victoria Northridge, described culture to me as "the piece that makes everything else 'make sense', that enables connections to be made between the language and how to use it, when to use it, whom to expect it from, and what kind of response to expect after you use it." Thus a teacher who views culture as an integral part of a syllabus might include the development of awareness of the role culture plays in human interaction, how to understand and interpret the cultural aspects of language and behavior, and the development of skills in behaving and responding in culturally appropriate ways in addition to knowledge of the target culture.

The learning of language through or in conjunction with subject matter can also be the focus of a language course. Such courses have been called content-based because they integrate "particular content with language teaching aims" (Brinton, Snow, and Wesche 1989). Such content may be school- or work-related — for example, history, economics, or computer technology. A content-based course may teach the subject matter directly or use subject matter as the basis for language-learning lessons. Thus the target language can be both a means for and a by-product of learning the subject matter. Content-based approaches play a critical role in bilingual programs for children as well as in ESP courses and, increasingly, in EAP courses. We can add culture and content to our syllabus grid:
Another major change in how teachers conceptualize content has come about because of the view that one teaches learners, not just language. The emphasis on the learner has introduced other important elements into a teacher's conception of what she will teach: the learner's affect, which includes attitudes, self-confidence, and motivation, and the learner's approach to learning, which includes both understanding and developing one's learning skills. How to improve learners' self-confidence or helping learners become aware of their attitude toward the target culture may be explicitly included in a syllabus, as may activities that help learners become aware of their strengths and overcome their weaknesses as learners. The development of definitions, taxonomies, and methods of developing learning strategies is one way in which the emphasis on helping learners become self-aware has influenced syllabus design (O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990). Fisher (Chapter 4) combines elements from a content-based approach, a learner-training-based approach, and an academic language-based approach in her syllabus for her social studies ESL course. For each area—language, content, and strategies—she lists objectives for developing students' awareness and attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

For some teachers, enabling students to participate in determining the content of their course so that what they do in class gives them the tools to cope with and change what they will encounter outside of the classroom is the focus of their course. Thus they ask the learners to engage in participatory processes that help them understand the social context of their problems and take control of their personal and professional lives through work in the classroom (Auerbach 1993; Auerbach and Wallerstein 1987). The problem-posing and experiential learning techniques described by Uvin in Chapter 3 illustrate this approach to syllabus design.

We can now add two more categories to the syllabus grid, learning strategies and participatory processes. The completed grid is shown in Figure 1.

**Issues**

Teaching involves making choices. It is not possible to teach a syllabus that explicitly encompasses all the areas mentioned here so teachers must decide which categories make sense to them for a given course. The categories also overlap, both conceptually and in the classroom. For example, pronunciation is an important part of speaking skills. Vocabulary development is a part of notions and topics. Learning strategies can be linked to specific skills. Some of the categories are vast and can be divided into several subcategories. Many readers will find that they would label or define the categories differently or that certain categories are missing. For example, some teachers conceptualize content thematically.

Teachers of courses whose content has already been specified will face different issues. They may find that the breadth of content is unrealistic for the amount of time they have to teach it or that the way content has been defined is inappropriate, in their view, for the purposes of the course. The overlapping nature of the categories may be an aid in finding ways to adapt the existing content to their vision of the course.
Selecting and developing materials and activities

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

For many teachers, course development starts not with determining objectives or conceptualizing content but with ideas about the course in action. They think about material 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. As Barbara Fujiwara puts it in Chapter 7, “Though now I do try to articulate objectives, my method of planning still begins with activities and visions of the class.”

For many teachers, the material they use forms the backbone of the course. It is something concrete that students use, and it provides a focus for the class. Choosing material may mean development of new material when teaching a course for which there are no suitable materials, collecting a variety of materials, or adapting existing materials. Teachers consider a variety of factors in developing, choosing, or adapting materials. Two of the most important are their effectiveness in achieving the purposes of the course and their appropriateness for the students — and the teacher. Appropriateness includes student comfort and familiarity with the material, language level, interest, and relevance. Some teachers incorporate instruction in how to use unfamiliar materials as part of their course design. Feasibility and availability are also important to consider. In Chapter 7, Fujiwara describes a situation in which a text that seemed right in achieving the purposes of the course, developing listening skills and strategies, was in practice too difficult for the students and hence not appropriate at all.

Developing new materials and activities for using them requires time and a clear sense of why they will be used, how, and by whom. Because of the lack of time, teachers are often constrained or prefer to adapt existing materials. Maria Estela Pinheiro (Chapter 6) had the time to develop the materials for a writing supplement to the existing teen courses in her school. Her sense of purpose derived from the skill being learned, writing; her understanding of the writing process; and her perception that students needed to feel prepared with each step, to feel that the material was relevant to them, and to interact with one another in using it. Consequently, she developed materials that met those criteria.

Experienced teachers often develop a set of core materials and activities that they adapt each time they teach a course. The materials themselves are flexible and can be used in a number of ways, depending on the target skills or competencies. For example, newspaper articles can be used as a basis for developing reading skills, expanding vocabulary, or discussing culture. Pictures can be used as a focus for learning grammar or as a starting point for a writing assignment. Core activities are related to the way the teacher conceptualizes the content. A teacher may have a repertoire of activities for teaching pronunciation or for having students learn to understand cultural differences. For some teachers, materials and activities are integrated into a method, such as the “language experience” approach (Rigg 1989). The emphasis on proficiency and learning language in context has led many teachers to use as much authentic material as possible in their classes (Omaggio Hadley 1993). For content-based courses, authentic material is the foundation. In Chapter 5, Blyth prepares for his EAP course by making a list of both materials and activities that students can use to develop their academic skills. She will then choose from these materials as her course progresses.

For teachers who are required to use a certain text, course development is the adaptation of the text, for the content of the text determines the content of the course. However, the text is not the course; rather, what the teacher and students do with the text constitutes the course. Textbooks are tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course. The material in a textbook can be modified to incorporate activities that will motivate students and move them beyond the constraints of the text. Das (1988: viii) points out that materials should not “pre-specify learning outcomes or attempt to control or substantially guide learning; their function is primarily to provide opportunities for learning through interaction.”

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

Issues

For some teachers, the lack of materials is a challenge; for others, it is an opportunity. Developing materials requires time before, during, and after the course — for preparing, using, and modifying them, respectively. Yet having to use certain materials may produce the dilemma of coping with a text that does not meet students’ needs or does not promote the teacher’s
view of the roles of learners and teachers. Other aspects of course development, such as needs assessment and objective setting, may help the teacher see how to adapt unsuitable materials and to what extent. Eventually, all materials are adapted or modified in some way. Even materials that have been developed by teachers for specific courses will be modified over time.

Organization of content and activities

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

Regardless of 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. Systems can focus on the lesson level (the organization of each lesson) and on the course level (the overall organization of the course). We will look first at specific considerations in sequencing material and then at considerations of the overall organization of the course.

Two general, complementary principles of sequencing are building and recycling. In deciding how to sequence material, one considers building from the simple to the complex, from more concrete to more open-ended or so that unit or activity A prepares students for unit or activity B. Building from the simple to the complex in a writing course may mean learning how to write narrative prose before developing an argumentative paper. In an introductory language course, it may mean learning the numbers 1 to 9 to use telephone numbers and then learning the numbers 10 to 60 to tell time. Building from more concrete to more open-ended in a writing course may mean that students first unscramble and discuss a sample paragraph before writing their own paragraph. In an introductory language course, it may mean talking about a family in a textbook picture using prescribed vocabulary before talking about one’s own family.

Conceiving of activities as building blocks puts them in a “feeding” relation where one activity feeds into another “if it provides something that is needed for the second one . . . or the second exercise could not be done unless the first had already been completed” (Low 1989: 145). For example, in a reading unit, students predict the content from pictures or headings that accompany the text before actually reading the text. Or prior to a restaurant role-playing activity, students learn menu items and the language for ordering food.

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

Sequencing occurs on the macro level of the course, as well as on the micro level of a week or unit or lesson within a course. In Chapter 6, Pinheiro describes sequencing the activities and materials for her writing course within each level, going from more concrete to more open-ended activities, as well as from one level to the next, requiring progressively longer and more difficult essays.

Two complementary ways to approach the overall organization of a course are as a cycle or as a matrix. Both approaches suggest a core of material to be learned and activities to be conducted within a given time frame. In the cyclical approach, a regular cycle of activities follows a consistent sequence. For example, in Chapter 7, for her advanced listening course, Fujitaka divides each session into three parts, the first for dictation of the homework assignment, the second for student presentations, and the third for watching and discussing a video. Pinheiro (Chapter 6) follows a cycle of activities for writing that reflects the steps of the writing process. The experiential learning cycle, as interpreted by Kolb (1984), has also been used as the basis for a cyclical approach to course organization (Shaferi 1991).

In a matrix approach, the teacher works with a set of possible activities for a given time frame and, as the course progresses, decides which activities to work with. In Chapter 5, for her EAP course, Blyth describes such a situation, in which she compiles a list of possible activities and materials and then decides which to use, depending on her students’ interests as well as the availability of the materials.

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

Although the order in which the content and materials are taught may be determined prior to teaching the course, it may also be determined and modified as the course progresses. For some teachers, a negotiated syllabus, in which teacher and students decide together what they will learn, is preferable. In such cases, a predetermined sequence is seen as a handicap as it does not allow teachers to take into account the particular group of students in their course. In such a course, the sequence is not determined beforehand. Rather, the teacher has a map of the possible territory and works with the students to determine where it is most useful for them to go and in what order. Where a syllabus is provided, achieving flexibility is an issue.

Evaluation

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

For most teachers, evaluation means evaluation within the course: assessing students' proficiency, progress, or achievement. How proficient are students in listening? Are students improving their writing skills? Have they learned to function in English in the workplace? Teachers build in some form of student evaluation when developing a course, ranging from formal tests to informal assessments. Hughes (1989) discusses four purposes for testing: to measure proficiency, to diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses, to place students in a course or program, and to assess their achievement in a course or program. The same testing instrument may be used for more than one purpose. For example, the TOEFL test is used by graduate programs in the United States as a proficiency test, but it is sometimes used as an achievement test if students show a gain on a TOEFL posttest. An oral entrance interview for placement purposes may also be used as an exit interview for purposes of assessing achievement. However, tests are not the only means teachers have to assess their students. Teachers may structure their classroom activities so that they can assess their students while the students participate. They may use a portfolio approach, in which students put together a portfolio of their work (Fingeret 1993). They may involve their students in deciding what should be assessed and how (Hull 1992).

Evaluation in course development also includes evaluation of the course itself. Was the course effective? In what ways? Where did it fall short? Such an evaluation may not be directly linked to assessment of student progress, although student evaluation and test results can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the course. If the students do well on tests or are judged to have made progress, presumably the course has been effective. But if students do not make progress or do not demonstrate a certain level of achievement, the effectiveness of the course may be questioned. Finding where the fault lies would be one of the purposes of course evaluation and could involve having students suggest why they did not make the progress expected.

Why does one evaluate? Generally speaking, a course is evaluated to promote and improve its effectiveness. This may be an internal matter, as when the teacher is concerned with developing the best course possible, in which case the evaluation is done largely for the benefit of the students and the teacher. However, courses are also evaluated to provide documentation for policy reasons, such as continued funding or retention in the curriculum. In such cases, evaluation is an external matter, and the teacher may be required to use certain methods of evaluation or to document the effectiveness of the course in a manner prescribed by an outside party. In Chapter 3, Johan Uvin describes how the need to document the effectiveness of his workplace course for the funding source influenced the development of the course. Similarly, the importance of accountability to the corporate client influenced the way Laura Hull (Chapter 8) developed her curriculum framework.

What can be evaluated? Any part of the process of course development can be evaluated, including the assumptions about and analysis of students' needs or backgrounds, goals and objectives, materials and activities, means of assessing students' progress, student participation, student roles, and the teacher's role. Thus, each element of the framework is itself subject to evaluation. Was the needs assessment effective? Did I seek the right input, and did it enable me to make appropriate decisions about the course? If not, why not? Were the goals and objectives appropriate and achievable? Should they be changed? Did students find the material appropriately challenging, or was it too easy or too difficult? Were the activities appropriate? Did all students participate easily? Did I find suitable ways to evaluate students' progress? Did the tests test what had been learned?

When does one evaluate? In curriculum design, a distinction is usually made between formative evaluation, which takes place during the development and implementation of the curriculum for purposes of modifying it as it is being developed, and summative evaluation, which takes place after the curriculum has been implemented, for purposes of evaluating its success and improving it for future implementation (Brown 1989). A teacher who is involved in each stage of course design can think of evaluation as an ongoing part of the entire process. Thus evaluation can occur in the planning and teaching stages of the course, after it is over, and when it is replanned and retaught. In Chapter 8, Hull sets up systems of inquiry into
the corporate language program she is directing, which enable her to re-form the program into a coherent curriculum.

Who evaluates? At the course level, the teacher and the students are the principal evaluators. However, administrators, funders, parents, and clients may have a role in evaluation, and their role may influence the shape or existence of the course. In Chapter 8, Hull describes how she sought input from the corporations who sent their employees, the employees who took the courses, and the teachers to determine how to set up the most effective program. In Chapter 3, Uvin describes the way in which the funder’s expectations influence the method of evaluation as well as the existence of the course.

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

Issues

Teachers tend to avoid extensive evaluation because they feel inadequate to a task in what they consider is the domain of “experts,” for which special training in systematic analysis is necessary. Teachers must become familiar with the various purposes and types of testing, but they must also devise their own systems and areas of inquiry. As with needs assessment, teachers must experiment with different methods of evaluation and monitor the success of each so as to maximize the effectiveness of their courses.

Consideration of resources and constraints

What are the givens of my situation?

Resources and constraints are two ways of looking at the same thing. A required course book may be a constraint for one teacher and a resource for another. A class of fewer than ten students may be a resource for one teacher and a constraint for another. Though these givens may seem secondary to the processes just described, in fact 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. I have referred to this earlier as problematizing: defining the challenges of one’s situation so that one can make decisions about what to do. In the absence of problematizing, a teacher may seek to graft solutions appropriate to another unique situation onto her situation. This became clear to me in the case of an EFL teacher who faced an extraordinary challenge: designing a conversation class for 140 students in a space meant for half as many. She felt that having examples of needs analysis questionnaires would be a key to developing her course. To me, this was an example of a teacher seeking answers from outside without having first specifically defined the challenges of her own situation. Such problematizing could eventually result in an examination of how others approached needs analysis as an aid in developing her own. Here is a sketch of one way of problematizing this teacher’s situation:

- This is a conversation class, but there are 140 students in a space that fits 70. I need to look at ways of working within the constraints of the classroom such as ways to group or rotate students.
- What kinds of conversations can 140 students possibly have? I need to assess their language ability (At what level can they carry on a conversation?) and find out about their background and interests (What can they have conversations about?). How will I go about doing that? What kinds of questions should I ask them? If the assessment shows that their ability is low, I need to focus on the kind of preparation and foundation work necessary for conversations to take place.
- How can I get them to work together to have these conversations? Classroom management is an issue. I need to look at available materials with carefully structured activities as a means of classroom management. Or perhaps I could ask other teachers what has worked for them in this situation.
- How can I monitor their activity? I need to examine my role in the classroom. I also need to think about the types of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms I will use in the class.
- What has worked in the past? I need to think about the activities or classes in which I felt that things went well. Why did they go well? What can I take from those successes and build into this course?

These are questions that I propose. Were the teacher to go through a similar process, she might ask different ones or respond to the same ones in different ways because of her intimate knowledge of her context and her role in it. For example, how students are graded, whether there is a required text, and attendance patterns would all influence the kinds of questions she would ask. I included the question about past successes because teachers carry their experience over from one context to the next, and being able to understand what has been successful and why can provide a foundation for
planning a course. In the context under discussion, the teacher had already taught the course and thus could be realistic in her expectations about what she could hope to accomplish with this group of students.

The constraints and resources of one's situation take many forms, some tangible, others not. Teachers work with or without physical and material resources such as books, technology, a classroom, and furniture. The lack of physical resources may encourage a teacher to use available resources in creative ways. The availability of technology may allow a teacher to have groups of students work independently. Time is another important consideration in designing a course. How often, how long, and over what period of time will the class meet? How much time is available to the teacher to prepare for the course and the classes? A teacher may adjust her teaching priorities according to the length of the course. The kinds of activities she designs may be affected by the amount of time she has, both in class and before class.

The institutional philosophy, policy, and curriculum are important given. Having to work within existing curricular guidelines is both a constraint and a resource; so is having to devise one's own syllabus. The type of administrative and clerical support provided by the institution affects a teacher's choices. For example, lack of clerical support will suggest streamlining paperwork and materials. Support from the administration for innovation will encourage experimentation.

The numbers, levels, and cultural backgrounds of the students are both a constraint and a resource. For example, a large class may cause a teacher to focus on classroom management. A multilevel class may influence the teacher's selection of material or activities.

The teacher herself is the most important given. Her background, experience, and beliefs play a significant role in the choices she makes. For example, one teacher will focus on certain content because she deems it essential to successful language learning, while another will ignore the same content. A teacher who usually develops her own materials may choose to use published materials when teaching a course whose content is new to her.

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

Issues

The givens of one's teaching situation, both tangible and intangible, cannot be ignored. Effecting change requires both recognizing what can be changed and accepting what cannot. The "If only . . ." syndrome (if only we had the technology, if only we had quieter classrooms, if only our students were more motivated) can obstruct change as firmly as the "Yes, but . . . ." syndrome (Yes, but that will never work in my setting.) Problematizing enables a teacher to decide what she can change, what she can't, and where to start.

Conclusion

The components discussed in this chapter and summarized in Table 1, should serve not as a checklist for the teacher but rather as a set of tools for talking about, understanding, and directing the process of course development. Each component is contingent on every other component. For example, assessment depends on how one conceptualizes content or on how one interprets students' needs. Conceptualizing content in turn influences the course goals and objectives. Thus wherever one starts in the process, each component will eventually come into play. Each component is, in many respects, one way of working with the whole, as we will see in the following chapters.

References


Johnson, R. K. ed. 1989. A decision-making framework for the coherent lan-


3 Designing workplace ESOL courses for Chinese health-care workers at a Boston nursing home

Johan Uvin

Johan Uvin, originally from Belgium, has extensive experience in workplace ESOL with immigrants in the Boston area. He has taught immigrants, worked in staff development, written proposals, and directed workplace literacy programs. He has managed workplace education grants and, since 1993, has supervised adult basic education development efforts for the Massachusetts Department of Education. In this chapter he gives us “a tale of two courses.” He designed and taught a course for Chinese health-care workers in Boston using the competency-based methods in widespread use at that time. He spent over ninety hours doing an exhaustive needs analysis that involved not only the students but also nursing staff, supervisors, patients, and administrators. He decided, however, that even though the course did what it was designed to do, it had failed his students. In this chapter, he tells us why he felt this to be the case and how he radically redirected the course as a result.

The course development focus for this chapter is needs assessment. Consider the following questions as you read:

In this account of course development, who determined what the students’ needs were? How were those needs defined?

Uvin describes two approaches to course design. In each approach, how were the students involved in determining needs?

In my third year as a teacher at the Chinese-American Civic Association (CACA), we received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Workplace Literacy Program to provide a course for Chinese health-care workers at the South Cove Manor Nursing Home in Boston. I was asked to design the course, which would be taught by me and by my colleagues in two 22-week cycles.

Further reading

Historical overview


Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this book give a clear analysis of how the emergence of communicative competence as the focus of language teaching has changed the role of the teacher, especially in the area of course design.


The first part of this book examines the effects of different Western educational value systems on curriculum development and renewal in general as well as in specific relation to the teaching of foreign languages.

Overview of curriculum development processes


This chapter serves as both an introduction to the book and as an overview of the processes of a language curriculum and the roles and responsibilities of the people involved in them.


The first chapter, “Curriculum Development in Second Language Teaching,” provides concise definitions and clear explanations of the curriculum development processes of needs analysis, goals and objectives, syllabus design, methodology, and testing and evaluation.
Chapter 10, "Materials Design," provides a model for designing ESP materials and various examples of materials developed from the model.

Organization of content and activities


Pages 51–63, provide examples of ways of organizing a syllabus.


Chapter 6, "Sequencing and Integrating Tasks," offers principles of sequencing and integrating tasks with examples from published materials.


The table of contents of this intermediate-course book provides an outline of one way in which structure, usage, and vocabulary are integrated with the development of reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills.

Evaluation


As its title suggests, this chapter gives an overview of evaluation, what it is, its various purposes, and how it can be carried out.


This is a teacher-friendly, accessible overview of the types and purposes of testing and evaluation, with guidelines for constructing tests of the four skills, grammar, and vocabulary.


Chapter 8, "Assessment and Evaluation," examines the relationship between assessment of student learning and evaluation of the curriculum, and provides examples.


Pages 148–156 examine the formative role that evaluation plays in curriculum development and the ways in which teachers and learners can provide data for such evaluation.

Consideration of constraints and resources


This chapter provides a useful checklist of constraints for use in planning curricula in "real time."