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0521358434 - The Learner-Centred Curriculum: A Study in Second Language Teaching

David Nunan

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Cath
for her time, patience and support.

Contents

Series Editors' Preface x

Preface xi

1 Introduction 1

 1.1 Preamble 1

 1.2 Linguistics and Language Teaching 1

 1.3 Learner-Centred Curriculum Development 2

 1.4 The Curriculum Process 4

 1.5 The Structure of the Study 8

 1.6 Conclusion 9

2 Curriculum Processes 10

 2.1 Traditional Approaches to the Curriculum 10

 2.2 ESL and Curriculum Planning 15

 2.3 Summary 20

3 Learner-Centred Curriculum Development 21

 3.1 Introduction 21

 3.2 Theoretical Bases for Learner-Centred Curricula 22

 3.3 Communicative Language Teaching and Learner-Centred Curricula 24

 3.4 Communicative Language Teaching – The Teacher's Perspective 28

 3.5 The Concept of Language Proficiency 32

 3.6 Towards a Generalised Language Curriculum Framework 35

 3.7 The Teacher and the Curriculum 36

 3.8 Summary 41

4 Pre-Course Planning Procedures 42

 4.1 Introduction 42

 4.2 The Starting Point 42

 4.3 Needs Analysis 43

 4.4 Participants in Pre-Course Planning Procedures 45

 4.5 Grouping Learners 46

 4.6 Resources for Planning 48

viii *Contents*

4.7	Investigating Needs—Analysis Procedures	51
4.8	Conclusion	52
5	Planning Content	54
5.1	Introduction	54
5.2	Content Selection – An Empirical Investigation	55
5.3	Analytical Approaches to Content Specification	57
5.4	Deriving Content from Learner Data	62
5.5	Grading Content	66
5.6	Conclusion	75
6	Methodology	76
6.1	Introduction	76
6.2	Methodology and Communicative Language Teaching	78
6.3	Acquisition in the Classroom	81
6.4	Stimulating Classroom Acquisition	84
6.5	Methodology in a Learner-Centred Curriculum	88
6.6	Negotiating Learning Activities	95
6.7	Conclusion	97
7	Resources for a Learner-Centred Curriculum	98
7.1	Introduction	98
7.2	Materials in a Learner-Centred Curriculum	99
7.3	The Community as a Resource	105
7.4	The Teacher as Developer of Resources	108
7.5	Conclusion	115
8	Assessment and Evaluation	116
8.1	The Place of Evaluation in the Curriculum	116
8.2	Some Key Concepts in Evaluation	118
8.3	Some Key Questions in Evaluation	121
8.4	The Assessment of Second-Language Proficiency	123
8.5	Techniques for Self-Assessment	130
8.6	Conclusion	134
9	Evaluation and Professional Development	136
9.1	Introduction	136
9.2	Evaluation and the Planning Process	137
9.3	Evaluation and the Implemented Curriculum	138
9.4	Evaluation and the Assessed Curriculum	142
9.5	Causes of Learner Failure	144
9.6	Evaluation and Teacher Development	147
9.7	Conclusion	150

Cambridge University Press
0521358434 - The Learner-Centred Curriculum: A Study in Second Language Teaching
David Nunan
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents ix

10 The Teacher as Curriculum Developer 151

10.1 Introduction 151

10.2 The Teacher as Curriculum Developer –
A National Study 151

10.3 Future Directions 174

10.4 Conclusion 178

References 181

Appendix 187

Subject Index 191

Author Index 195

Cambridge University Press

0521358434 - The Learner-Centred Curriculum: A Study in Second Language Teaching

David Nunan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Series Editors' Preface

Australia has one of the largest and most dynamic migrant education language programmes in the world. What makes the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) unique is that although the program is co-ordinated at the national level, the process of curriculum development it embodies is bottom up rather than top down. At each institution where migrant language programs are offered, learners are actively involved in setting their own goals and determining what and how they will learn. It is this experience which Dr David Nunan, director of the National Curriculum Resource Centre, Adelaide, presents in this important book.

This is more than just an account of the AMEP however. This book offers a model of what curriculum development is. David Nunan shows that curriculum development involves the interaction of needs analysis, goal setting, grading and sequencing of content, materials development, implementation and evaluation, and shows how these processes interact within a learner-centered approach to curriculum. Throughout, the discussion is illustrated with numerous examples from the AMEP experience. At the same time, Nunan demonstrates that curriculum work must move beyond speculation and have a solid empirical basis if it is to have any substance, and illustrates the use of questionnaire, interview and case study data in curriculum planning. In addition, Nunan demonstrates that language curriculum practitioners have much to learn from mainstream educational research and practice.

The AMEP is a unique example of a national curriculum project which attributes a central role to both teachers and learners at every phase of the curriculum process. As such, it should be examined carefully by all those involved in language curriculum work. We are happy to have the opportunity to bring this important work to the attention of a wider audience through its publication in the Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series.

Michael H. Long
Jack C. Richards

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[More information](#)

Preface

This book presents curriculum theory and practice as these are applied to English language teaching. The concept of 'learner-centredness' provides a unifying theme for the work as a whole, and, while the focus of the study is adult ESL, it is hoped that the book has something to say to those working in EFL and also to those working with children.

The book takes a 'bottom-up' view of curriculum development. In other words, it is grounded in studies of what language teachers actually do and think as they plan, implement and evaluate their language programmes, rather than on what curriculum specialists say they ought to do. A series of exemplary case studies of teachers at work illustrates and reinforces the theoretical perspectives presented in the body of the book.

The book attempts to marry theoretical perspectives and empirical insights from applied linguistics with those from curriculum research and development. It is hoped that the marriage is a happy one, and that the strengths rather than the weaknesses of both disciplines are apparent in the work. It is also hoped that teachers, researchers and academics working within a linguistic paradigm might come to see the benefits to be derived from applying general educational theory and research to language teaching.

This book owes a great deal to the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) which is charged with the task of providing English language learning opportunities to non-English speaking immigrants to Australia. The studies in the book were only made possible by the collaboration, assistance and involvement of many of the fifteen hundred teachers employed by the AMEP. These teachers gave generously of their time and professional expertise, and the ideas and insights presented here belong to them.

While it is not possible to name all those who helped make this study possible, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the support and assistance of several special individuals. Foremost is Geoff Brindley who was a joint partner in the development of many of the ideas presented here. I owe a great deal to the editors of this series, Jack Richards and Mike Long, both of whom have been extremely supportive. I should also like to thank the following individuals for their encouragement, assistance and advice: Chris Candlin, Carole Urzua, Pat Rigg, Alan Beretta and Leo van Lier. Thanks are also due to my colleagues at the

Cambridge University Press

0521358434 - The Learner-Centred Curriculum: A Study in Second Language Teaching

David Nunan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii *Preface*

National Curriculum Resource Centre, in particular to Jill Burton and Mary Szabo. Finally, I should like to thank Peter Donovan, Adrian du Plessis and Ellen Shaw from Cambridge University Press for their advice and support.

Adelaide, April 1987.