PART I
1 CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

1 *A decision-making framework for the coherent language curriculum*[1]

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Introduction

In this introductory paper, I have three major aims: first to provide a framework for discussing the language curriculum; second to define the notion of a 'coherent' language curriculum, the theme of this book as well as the title of this paper; and third to show how the other papers in this volume and the particular aspects of development they focus upon relate to the curriculum process as a whole.

The word 'curriculum' is defined here in its broadest sense, to include all the relevant decision making processes of all the participants. The products of these decision making processes generally exist in some concrete form and can be observed and described: for example policy documents, syllabuses, teacher-training programmes, teaching materials and resources, and teaching and learning acts. The processes themselves are usually more difficult to identify and analyse. They involve such questions as: Who is supposed to make the decisions and who actually does? How are these people selected and what qualifications do they have? What are their terms of reference? What resources in time, money, information and expertise are available to them? etc. Other 'process' factors such as prejudice, preconception, ambition or laziness are even harder to examine, but may be no less influential in their effects.

The framework consists of three sets of constraints on curriculum decision making. The first is policy. A curriculum which appears in all other respects to be successful, but which fails to achieve its aims, is hard to justify however much the participants may have benefited from their experience in other ways, for example socially or financially. The second consists of pragmatic considerations such as time and resources, human and material. Any curriculum design must take adequate account of these

1 I would like to acknowledge the valuable comments of David Stern, Patrick Allen and in particular Merrill Swain on the draft version of this paper, and also the assistance of the Modern Language Centre staff at O.I.S.E., where work on the preparation of this collection was completed.

constraints or fail to achieve its aims. The third consists of the participants in the curriculum process and the ways in which they interact. Their task is to reconcile policy and pragmatics and to achieve and maintain, at each stage of development, products of the decision-making process which are mutually consistent and compatible. Such a curriculum is said to be 'coherent'.

Factors which promote coherence or its opposite 'mismatch' are discussed in the sections which follow in relation to each of these three dimensions and 'process' and 'product'. The final section considers the role of evaluation in curriculum decision making. Brief comments along the way show how the topics of other contributors to the book fit into this framework.

Policy decision making

The four stages or decision points in policy implementation are:

1 Curriculum planning
2 Ends/means specification
3 Programme implementation
4 Classroom implementation

These four headings with 'Evaluation' also make up the five section headings of this book. The planning stage consists of all those decisions taken before the development and implementation of the programme begins. Ends specification relates to objectives, and means specification to method; programme implementation involves teacher training and materials/resources development. Decision making at the classroom implementation stage has as its products the acts of the teacher and the learner (Table 1).

The term 'policy' is used to refer to any broad statement of aims whether at the level of a national curriculum (for example Japanese should be taught as a foreign language in secondary schools), or as a 'good idea' a teacher or learner may put forward for the classroom (for example: let's have a debate on Friday afternoons). In this sense the stages of policy determination, specification and implementation are ordered. The policy or idea must exist. It must then be operationally defined. Any necessary resources must be prepared. These must then be presented (a teaching act) so that learning acts may follow.

Curriculum planning

Policy makers are responding to 'needs'; their own, other people's or those of an entire society. They determine the overall aims of the

TABLE 1. STAGES, DECISION-MAKING ROLES AND PRODUCTS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Developmental stages	*Decision-making roles*	*Products*
1. curriculum planning	policy makers	policy document
2. specification: ends	needs analyst	syllabus
means	methodologists	
3. programme implementation	materials writers	teaching materials
	teacher trainers	teacher-training programme
4. classroom implementation	teacher	teaching acts
	learner	learning acts

curriculum and are influenced in varying degrees by special interest groups who are able to bring pressure to bear.

In different educational contexts, different people will play the role of policy maker and the policy will be stated more or less formally. A language learner who hires a tutor is the policy maker. However, the teacher may influence the learner to modify that policy, or may subvert it by implementing an inappropriate curriculum, for example the one that happens to be available, without mentioning the fact to the learner.

A commercial language school makes its own policy and sets this out in a prospectus. Students decide whether the aims stated coincide with their own. Policy in this case may be determined primarily by market forces.

National language policies are determined by socio-political pressures which vary from one culture and socio-political system to another; the primary consideration of most governments being to maintain, and if possible extend their power, influence and acceptability.

Policy statements tend to be utopian. 'Promises are cheap', 'hope springs eternal', and there are no limits on what is desirable. It is not the business of language curriculum specialists to tell governments or the public what they should want, but it is our business to state what is and what is not attainable and the costs of implementation. (Swales in Part II discusses the concept of 'opportunity cost' in this broad 'ecological' rather than economic sense.) There are well-established constraints on

what can be achieved, for example in situations where opportunities for learning are brief and intermittent, opportunities for forgetting almost infinite, and where there is no contact with the target language outside the classroom (for example Strevens, 1977: 29). However, governments and language schools which promise only what they can perform are likely to go out of business, and language educators who criticise policies as unrealistic sometimes find their career opportunities have not been enhanced.

There is in fact an inherent danger of mismatch between policy and the learning outcomes which the implemented curriculum is capable of achieving. Rodgers, in the paper which follows this one, maintains that decisions taken at the curriculum planning stage, and what he refers to as 'polity factors' generally, have a far greater impact on the success of curriculum development than decisions relating to the implementation of the curriculum *per se*.

Ends/means specification

Policy statements, however detailed, are directives not specifications. They are not formulated to meet the requirements of curriculum development. Ends/means specification is the process by which policy, and the means by which it is to be implemented, are operationally defined. Ends specification should provide an exact characterisation of the target proficiency. Means specification should prescribe the method by which that target proficiency will be achieved. Those who make decisions about these specifications are referred to here as syllabus writers, and the formal product of their decision making as a syllabus. If the specifications in the syllabus are inadequate, the curriculum becomes potentially less coherent (i.e. divergent decisions may be made inadvertently at subsequent stages in the developmental process) and actually more difficult to evaluate, since criteria would have to be inferred.

In the case of the Friday afternoon debates, to continue with that example, these might be designed in various ways: with advance preparation or without; with the teacher or with a student as chairperson; as a means for selecting the school debating team; to provide opportunities for the best students to extend themselves or to facilitate maximum participation by all students; to provide fluency practice; to promote vocabulary expansion, for general interest or as an opportunity to spot common errors in a 'natural' communicative context. Unless the ends are specified, an evaluator would have to guess what they might be, or impose what the evaluator thinks they ought to be. The debates themselves are in any case unlikely to be concluded successfully unless the teacher and the students have some shared understanding of the ends to be achieved and the means for achieving them.

Where a broader set of aims is concerned (for example Japanese as above), specifications at this stage of curriculum development become even more crucial, since a negotiated approach or trial and error can be successful in the context of a particular course or classroom, but is less likely to succeed where learning outcomes are expected to be comparable and examinable across several institutions or an education system.

ENDS SPECIFICATION

Decision making in this area has tended to follow one of two largely divergent lines of development. In the first, the general concern throughout education for accountability and cost effectiveness has prompted the specification of objectives in behavioural and verifiable forms. This approach, with the growing importance of E.S.P. programmes, has resulted in the development in language education of a technology of needs analysis. Problems of definition and implementation associated with various aspects of this approach are discussed by Berwick and Brindley in Part II of this book. The other approach, more cognitive in orientation, has extended the traditional notion of language learning as mastery of the grammatical system to a broader conception of communicative competence. Model building of the kind initiated by Canale and Swain (1980), supported by research programmes such as the one proposed by Bachman in Part V, may eventually lead to a developed theory of communicative competence which could support and inform decision making in ends specification (and evaluation), but a theoretical paradigm which involves the explanation of so much of human cognition will not be developed easily or rapidly. At this stage, our theories of communicative competence are abstract, speculative and fragmentary, but progress in this area has nevertheless been real. We now know enough about the schemata and processes which guide certain aspects of communication to suspect that lists of target behaviours are inadequate and possibly counter-productive either as ends specifications or as the basis for programme and classroom implementation. What we do not have, unfortunately, is an adequate descriptive account of the constructs of communicative competence that could be used in place of such lists.

MEANS SPECIFICATION

Discussions of language teaching methodology have been influenced by first and second language acquisition theory and a growing body of classroom observation studies. However, no conventional wisdom or consensus has yet emerged, as is demonstrated by the proliferation of methods, claims and counter-claims, since the demise of audio-lingualism. The communicative revolution in language teaching has broadened and enriched the repertoire of techniques available to language teachers and materials writers, but it does not as yet offer a principled basis for

selecting amongst them or for elevating a particular set of techniques into a globally applicable method. Even if theoretical purity could be achieved, it would remain less important for effective curriculum implementation than accommodation to the usually impure constraints of a particular educational context. The eclectic approach, a combination of experience, local knowledge, intuition and trial and error, is widely adopted for precisely this reason.

MISMATCH IN ENDS/MEANS SPECIFICATION

The practical value of a theoretical paradigm in any field of activity is that it establishes a consensus about a way to proceed and things to do. To the extent that the paradigm is established, detailed specification becomes less important; to the extent that it is not, the specifications themselves provide the primary means for achieving coherence. The communicative approach to language teaching provides many insights, but no paradigm, and the coherence of curriculums at present lies not in shared assumptions but in operational definitions. It is necessary to demonstrate that the ends specification matches the policy, and that means and ends are compatible. The grammar-translation method notoriously did not promote oral fluency, and an oral/aural approach does not develop writing skills. A Council of Europe style 'ends' specification may look like what a syllabus 'ought' to look like, but this style may be inappropriate for a policy whose aim, for example, is to promote study skills. 'Procedural display' (behaviour which enables participants to appear to be doing a good job when in fact they are not) is not limited to the classroom.

Above all, there must be no mismatch involving 'hidden' syllabuses. In many education systems the key question for students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and even inspectors is not, 'Are students gaining in communicative competence?' but, 'Are they on course for the examination?' In such a situation the examination is the ends specification, the item types constitute the means specification, and the official syllabus depends for its credibility on the extent to which the content of the examination is an adequate sample of that syllabus. Item types in examinations need to be selected and constructed with this 'washback' effect in mind. For example, if cloze is used in testing, doing cloze passages will occupy a considerable portion of teaching and learning time. If oral skills are judged by reading aloud, reading aloud will be practised, conversational fluency will not. A great deal of classroom behaviour which appears inexplicable and even bizarre in terms of the official policy can be readily understood once the 'hidden' syllabus has been identified.

Programme implementation

In the programme implementation stage, all those decisions are made which cannot be deferred until teachers and learners are preparing for or performing classroom acts. These decisions relate to the development of teaching and learning resources, and the preparation of teachers to ensure that the resources are used effectively; i.e. in accordance with the means specifications and with a clear understanding of the objectives to be achieved and the reasons for achieving them. As with earlier stages, these decisions may be made formally or informally, explicitly or implicitly, and the products are consequently more or less amenable to evaluation, revision, and transfer or adaptation to other educational contexts.

PROGRAMME RESOURCES

Teaching and learning materials provide the corpus of the curriculum. They normally exist as physical entities and are open to analysis, evaluation and revision in ways that teaching and learning acts are not; and they have a direct influence upon what happens in classrooms, which policy documents, syllabuses and teacher-training courses do not.

If the ends/means specifications constrain the materials writer too closely, creativity tends to be stifled. If the ends/means specifications are too loose, there is the possibility of mismatch, with the materials writer introducing an alternative curriculum which cannot easily be detected. My feeling is that, ideally, the materials writer should be closely associated with the process of ends/means specification (as a member of the syllabus committee for example) but should have considerable freedom in actual implementation; for example the materials writer need not be required to implement the ends/means specifications in a particular way, but must show, formally, that the specifications have been met. In practice, this idea is rarely achieved. Government curriculum units may be too rigidly constrained, commercial writers too little. The latter are usually excluded from syllabus committees on principle (to avoid charges of favouring particular publishers) and may have little understanding of the particular educational context they are writing for, particularly if they have an international rather than a specific market in mind. Commercially produced materials are generally piloted in schools prior to general release, at least by the more reputable publishers, and materials are often significantly modified as a result. However, this exercise is generally aimed at adjusting the product to the potential market rather than at evaluating the product itself. Financial and practical considerations ensure that the publisher must accommodate to the market and not the market to the publisher, who is rarely in a position to mount extensive teacher-training programmes. Many excellent lan-

guage teaching programmes have failed, their promoters falling into the hands of receivers or multinationals, because the materials were too alien, too complex, or too expensive for local taste.

These 'facts of life' notwithstanding, it is encouraging to note situations, particularly over the past ten years, where materials have been developed through curriculum projects involving materials writers, publishers, ministries of education and other consumers. On a smaller scale, E.S.P. projects have also sometimes achieved a high level of co-ordination. Collaborative ventures of this kind go a long way towards ensuring that the planning and development of a curriculum is coherent. Also, in case I should appear prejudiced against commercial publishers, I should add that large-scale materials development projects conducted without their support have rarely produced effective results. Lack of expertise, lack of resources, the impossibility of effective materials writing by committee and many other factors seem to contribute to this failure, including the low status of those involved in curriculum development within ministries of education. Talented individuals tend either to move into the commercial field or to be promoted to administrative positions which have little effect on teaching and learning outcomes, but which nevertheless carry more status, better pay and better long-term career prospects.

Even in the most highly developed materials projects, commercial or otherwise, the principles governing the selection, grading, organisation and presentation of contents are rarely stated in explicit and operational terms. A fully argued account of the relationship between the policy which is to be implemented and the constraints affecting the manner of implementation is even more rare. Teachers' guides offer advice at the level of 'procedure', stating often in considerable detail what to do with the materials, but not why the materials exist in the form that they do (F. C. Johnson, 1973, was a notable exception).

In smaller institutions, and in programmes developed by individual teachers, materials are often fragmentary, and poorly organised (for example as unordered piles of stencils in a cupboard) with little or no guidance as to how the materials should be used. This does not mean that the programme is incoherent as taught, though it may be, only that the curriculum exists primarily within the minds of its creators. When staff changes occur, the teaching materials, the only tangible evidence of that curriculum, make little sense to the newcomers. It is often easier and less frustrating to throw out what exists and begin again from scratch. However, where staffing continuity is relatively assured, the need for formalising the curriculum and for rigorous evaluation of course materials may be questionable in such institutions. A less formal, 'in-service' approach is likely to be more practicable and more productive.

Low, in Part III, discusses organising principles in materials design

which seem most readily generalisable across educational contexts. Other decisions, such as what is relevant, interesting and appropriate can only be considered within the context of a particular teaching and learning situation. Here too, the role of the materials writer is of critical importance. Littlejohn and Windeatt explore ways in which the materials writer can generate mismatch, not only within the curriculum, but between the curriculum and the broader aims of education and society.

TEACHER TRAINING

If the materials writer provides the body of the curriculum, teacher training should provide the spirit. In a coherent curriculum, teacher training would clarify policy aims as expressed in the syllabus, would show how ends and means relate, how they are embodied in the teaching programme and how particular classroom procedures complement the programme materials and optimise learning opportunities. The teacher trainer forms the bridge between the syllabus committee and the classroom, and is ideally placed to facilitate formative evaluation, to aid syllabus revision and to engage in ongoing curriculum development in collaboration with materials writers.

The reality is often the opposite of the ideal. At one extreme, the theoretical, teacher trainers tend to be specialists in applied linguistics in general, and methodology in particular. Their knowledge of the curriculum they supposedly serve is often limited, their attitude towards it may be dismissive and their efforts directed towards revolutionising rather than implementing it. They are critical of programme materials but have little contact with materials writers, and may urge teachers to create their own resources. They often have little sympathy with official policy and would like it changed, usually in a direction better suited to their favourite 'Method'. Meanwhile they espouse the cause of that method anyway, and when it conflicts, as it inevitably does, with the official examination, teachers are urged to ignore the examination. However justified their criticisms, these teacher trainers gain little credibility and have little influence, least of all with teachers. The problem is that they do not play the role which is pre-eminently theirs, that of promoting coherent implementation and development within the curriculum.

There are very different problems at the more practical end of the teacher-training continuum. These specialists are master craftsmen and they have a great deal of credibility with teachers. They see their task as one of handing down tried and tested techniques for implementing a particular programme in the classroom, and they rarely consider or ask teachers to consider the programme as an integrated whole. Their approach often makes the best of a bad programme, but it does not make the bad programme better.

In the first paper of Part III, Pennington provides a model of staff development as an integrated component within curriculum design, while Breen *et al.* describe the evolution over a number of years of a learner-centred approach to teacher training. As both these papers show, a teacher-training programme is a curriculum within a curriculum, embedded at the point of programme implementation. Its policy and pragmatic constraints are, or should be, determined to a large extent by those of the 'host' curriculum, but its role must be active and developmental as well as passive and implementational.

Classroom implementation

Teachers, learners and programme resources combine and interact to create learning opportunities, in ways discussed by Breen in Part IV. Classroom implementation is the final stage in the curriculum development process and also the most important, because ultimately learning acts determine curriculum outcomes. All other decisions merely, though importantly, constrain the decisions which inform those acts.

When implementing a language programme in the classroom, a major cause of mismatch is a difference between the actual proficiency levels of learners and the level assumed by the materials writer. Writers are bound to accept the ends specification in the syllabus as their target, otherwise their materials will not be used. If these ends are unrealistic, writers must either assume a higher level of proficiency on entry than actually exists, or must push learners forward at a pace more rapid than most of them can sustain.

Given the tendency for policy makers to be over-optimistic about what can be achieved, this form of mismatch is a frequent cause of curriculum failure. It is in my experience the most frequent cause of what is generally called 'poor' teaching, but is in fact 'survival' teaching. Its function is to enable students to continue in a curriculum which is too advanced for them. As an example, teachers may prepare students for a reading or listening task by anticipating problems and supplying answers until the possibility of error, along with challenge and genuine engagement with the text, have been virtually eliminated. However, when completion of the teaching programme in a given time is mandatory, it is unfair to blame teachers for the strategies they adopt to achieve that end. The problems associated with survival teaching are rarely caused and even more rarely solved at the classroom stage of development alone.

TEACHING ACTS

Where the 'official' curriculum differs radically from a teacher's beliefs about the roles of teachers and learners and the kinds of activities which promote language learning, what happens in the classroom is likely to