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Edited by

Robert Keith Johnson

University of Hong Kong



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Series editors' preface

This book in the Cambridge Applied Linguistics series presents an overview of the scope and dimension of language curriculum development and also demonstrates how many of its leading practitioners apply curriculum theory and practice to language teaching. Publication of this collection of mainly original papers is a healthy sign that, in the last few years, language curriculum practitioners have moved away from a narrow view of their work, one which focused largely on issues of content and methodology, to a more comprehensive, and at the same time, complex understanding of curriculum. This is one which encompasses policy making, needs assessment, instructional design and development, teacher preparation and development, as well as programme management and evaluation. This is a far cry from the days of 'syllabus design'.

The value of this collection of papers which Keith Johnson has assembled lies in the many different perspectives it offers on the language curriculum. Both macro and micro issues are presented, and curriculum development is seen to be a dynamic process that must be understood in its entirety if the particulars are to work with any degree of efficiency. Throughout, the emphasis is thus on systematicity and interrelatedness of elements. The message the book delivers is that if we wish to improve the effectiveness of language teaching programmes, we need to examine in more depth the hidden dimensions of language programmes. Educational institutions need to assume a greater degree of responsibility in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their own programmes and instructional materials. This book will serve as a valuable resource in this process, allowing practitioners in the field of language curriculum development to have a comprehensive introduction to theory and practice in this growing field.

Michael H. Long
Jack C. Richards

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Overview

The aim of this collection is to present 'state of the art' papers in language curriculum studies by writers who have been actively involved in shaping theory in this field and who, between them, have applied that theory in almost every part of the world and in a variety of contexts.

The idea of a 'coherent language curriculum' summarises the range of the papers included and the theme which unites them. 'Curriculum' is used in the British sense to include all the factors which contribute to the teaching and learning situation, while the term 'coherence' emphasises the interdependence of these factors and the need for mutually consistent and complementary decision making throughout the processes of development and evaluation.

To set this publication within the context of developments in language curriculum studies over the past twenty-five to thirty years, I would like to propose that applied linguistics, the theoretical arm of language teaching, has passed through two major phases in its brief history, and is now entering a third. The first phase was that of the communicative revolution when it was inspired by new ideas and iconoclastic zeal. Its main achievement was to demonstrate the inadequacies in theory and practice of the '*ancien régime*', but much that was valuable fell into disrepute or neglect through a form of guilt by association. The first revolutionary phase came to an end with applied linguistics focused upon the new linguistic sciences, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, divorced from its structuralist/behaviourist past, and distanced, if not estranged from the mainstream of educational theory.

The second phase was one of piecemeal reconstruction, epitomised by the flowering of a thousand methods. Work worthy of greater respect was carried out on particular aspects of the language curriculum to bring it more closely into line with our new and broader understanding of the nature of communicative competence and the processes of language acquisition and use. These aspects included needs analysis, the syllabus, materials design, the roles of the teacher and the learner and the nature of classroom interaction. The insights were genuine and the progress real, but there was little interaction between or integration of the different areas.

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A third phase seems to me to have been initiated during the 1980s with a growing interest in the curriculum process as a whole, attempts to put language teaching back in touch with educational theory in general and curriculum studies in particular (Stern, 1983) and to impose order on the chaos into which at least fringe communicative methodology had fallen (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). This third phase is one of consolidation and integration, with a new sense of realism replacing the ideological fervour and speculative utopianism that were all too characteristic of the revolutionary and post revolutionary phases.

This publication contributes to the 'new realism' and to a view of the language curriculum in which a discussion of any part must take account of the aims of and constraints upon the whole. The first paper, an overview, provides a framework for the seventeen papers which follow and a rationale for the sections into which the collection is divided: curriculum planning; ends/means specification; programme implementation (teacher training and materials writing); implementation in the classroom; and evaluation. The main focus of each paper is indicated in a short introduction to each section and in the overview. As would be expected from writers with such broad and diverse experience, their approach is constructive and lacks the proselytising zeal and factionalism which have done little for language teaching and learning and less for the reputation of applied linguistics as a discipline. In sum, the papers provide a major review of developments in language curriculum studies, and identify the problems that we currently face and the directions in which we need to move.

I would like to thank Jack Richards for proposing the collection, and for his consistent help throughout. Peter Donovan of Cambridge University Press and the contributors have had to put up with an editor who was not only learning his trade but travelling through China, England, Canada and Australia while doing so. Their tolerance and helpfulness have been greatly appreciated. I owe special thanks and appreciation to my wife, Anne, for her work on the bibliography and for her assistance in many other ways.

The book is organised in the following way:

Part I: Curriculum planning

In the first paper, in Part I, I describe language curriculum development, in the broadest sense, as a decision-making process. The framework I propose has three dimensions: that of policy, the aims of the curriculum, or what it seems desirable to achieve; pragmatics, the constraints on what it is possible to achieve; and finally the participants in the decision-making process, whose task it is to reconcile policy and pragmatics. Four

stages of decision making are identified: curriculum planning, ends/means specification, programme implementation, and implementation in the classroom. These stages provide the headings for the first four sections of this book. The heading for the fifth section, 'evaluation', is not seen as a stage in itself, but as a necessary and integral part of each and all of the stages already mentioned. I argue that these stages are ordered, but that the curriculum process overall must be interactive, so that decision making is fully informed; the coherence of the curriculum is more important than the 'perfection' of any or all of its separate parts.

A coherent curriculum is one in which decision outcomes from the various stages of development are mutually consistent and complementary, and learning outcomes reflect curricular aims. The achievement of coherence is said to depend crucially in most educational contexts upon the formalisation of decision-making processes and products. This formalisation facilitates consensus amongst those involved and is a prerequisite for effective evaluation and subsequent renewal. Decision making is therefore a continuing and cyclical process of development, revision, maintenance and renewal which needs to continue throughout the life of the curriculum.

In the second paper, Ted Rodgers considers the problems of curriculum planners, whose task is to set out a policy which is capable of being implemented. He maintains that failure in curriculum projects results more often from poor planning than from inadequacies in design and implementation *per se*. He develops this argument by examining three levels of programme planning: syllabus design, curriculum development and polity determination. In the same way that curriculum development may be regarded as a contextually enlarged view of syllabus design, polity determination is a contextually enlarged view of curriculum development, involving all the factors which need to be taken into account in general in educational planning, and in particular in determining the level and types of resources which will be required to implement a curriculum successfully. To assist in this process, and as a means to increase curriculum planners' awareness of the problems that are involved, Rodgers proposes a 'polity planning framework', a set of factor scales designed to assist planners in assessing the relative difficulty and 'cost' of implementing a particular curriculum change or innovation in a particular 'polito-pedagogical' context.

Peter Hargreaves's perspective is that of the evaluator and he argues that decisions relating to evaluation need to be taken during and as part of the curriculum planning process, and not, as is so often the case, as an afterthought to implementation. He presents and illustrates in use a checklist covering twelve major factors which need to be taken into account if evaluation is to be planned successfully: target audience, purpose, focus, criteria, method, means/instruments, agents, resources,

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time factors, findings, presentation of results and follow-up. These factors are interdependent since decisions in relation to one affect other decisions. The importance of integrating the various aspects of the curriculum in the planning stage is expressed concisely, if not euphorically, in the term 'Des-impl-evalu-ign' which, at my urging (Ed.) was promoted from the text to the title. Hargreaves proposes a logo, derived from it, which might be awarded to projects which meet the required criteria in curriculum design. Experience suggests that the logo might not be awarded very often.

Part II: Ends/means specification

Part II deals with that stage in the decision-making process in which policy is made educationally explicit; the stage most often discussed under the headings of needs analysis and syllabus construction. On the theoretical level, discussion has concentrated upon the questions: 'whose needs?' and 'how can these needs best be assessed?' For practitioners the main problem often lies in moving beyond the findings of a needs analysis to the development of a teaching and learning programme. The three papers in this section offer different perspectives on the theoretical issues and practical problems involved: Berwick, that of a Japanese steel company; Brindley, adult migrant education in Australia; and Swales, academic service English programmes at university level.

Richard Berwick describes the general theory from which needs analysis derives, the problems in applying that theory, and the major stages to be followed through from the decision that a needs analysis is necessary to the transformation of data into a set of aims (ends specifications) and a language teaching programme. He distinguishes different approaches to design and notes that many philosophies of planning, and mixtures of them, find their means of expression in different forms of needs-based syllabuses, depending upon how the notion of need is defined and who defines it. Berwick distinguishes between the 'felt' needs of the learner and the 'perceived' needs of authority, and describes a range of data-gathering techniques under the general headings of inductive (category-generating) and deductive (category-dependent) methods of achieving a needs profile. He shows that language curriculum projects based on needs analyses require the continuing commitment and co-operation of all those involved and all those affected, over a considerable period of time. Berwick illustrates the problems that occur when theory and practice collide, and discusses approaches most likely to achieve a successful outcome in a commercial environment. He concludes that needs analyses should be designed to serve an established policy and not as a policy-making, least of all as a policy-seeking exercise.

Geoff Brindley states as axiomatic the importance of sensitivity to learners' needs in learner-centred approaches to curriculum design, and of needs analysis itself as a prerequisite for the specification of language learning objectives in curriculum design in general. The two axioms nevertheless reveal a considerable potential for disagreement over the definition of 'needs' and what 'needs analysis' should entail. Brindley identifies and attempts to reconcile two major orientations within the discussion: a 'narrow' or 'product-oriented' interpretation which focuses upon the learners' current and future uses for the language; and a 'broad' or 'process-oriented' interpretation which focuses upon the needs of the student as a learner, with the latter view requiring 'means specification' to take account of affective and cognitive variables such as attitudes, motivation, personality and learning style. Brindley discusses the feasibility of fruitful negotiation between teachers and learners in a learner-centred approach and illuminates this controversial area by proposing that needs analyses cannot be effective if conducted only at the curriculum planning stage, since learners cannot make valid choices amongst 'methods' until they have experienced the available options. The investigation of the learners' felt needs must therefore be a process which continues throughout the life of the curriculum. In this sense, needs analysis should be seen as an aspect of formative evaluation.

John Swales considers what 'counts as' a paper on programme design and its potential value. He then develops and explores the notion that an educational programme, and in particular a 'service' programme, forms part of an ecosystem within which the various participants and interest groups co-exist symbiotically in an often precarious state of balance; one in which 'all the competing but interdependent elements need to survive if the ecosystem is not to suffer damage'. The concept of 'opportunity cost', borrowed from economics, is then applied to curriculum development. 'Opportunity' represents the gains that might be obtained by successful implementation of a new or revised policy while estimates of costs must take account of the damage the ecosystem might sustain. A parasitic (no disrespect intended) service organisation would need to be particularly alert to the possible consequences of annoying or damaging the host body. Not surprisingly, the ecological approach Swales advocates is one of 'cautious gradualism', and the costs to be taken into account when assessing opportunities for curricular innovation are seen as going far beyond the human and material resources directly required for implementing an ends/means specification. The identification of appropriate ends and means therefore depends as much and perhaps more upon factors external to the curriculum (cf. Rodgers's discussion in Part I of 'polity determination') as it does upon factors controlled directly by participants in the curriculum process.

Part III: Programme implementation

Part III deals with programme implementation: the stage at which ends and means are realised as a teaching and learning programme ready for use in the classroom. It has two related aspects, the training of teachers and the preparation of teaching and learning resources. The first paper discusses the relationship between staff training and programme implementation, maintenance and renewal; the second describes the development of a teacher-training programme, or rather curriculum, since policy and ends and means all change as the programme develops; the third and fourth papers deal with the writing, organisation and evaluation of resources within a programme.

Martha Pennington argues that ‘the heart of every educational enterprise, the force driving the whole enterprise towards its educational aims, is the teaching faculty’ and deals with this crucial issue of faculty development under three broad headings. In the first, *The education and training of language teachers*, she outlines areas of broad agreement as well as differences of approach (holistic versus competency-based), emphasis (knowledge, attitudes, skills), perspective (optimistic, pessimistic) and conceptualisation of the teaching act (magic, art, profession, craft, science). In the second section, *Organizing a language program faculty*, she discusses the extent to which administrative constraints predetermine other aspects of the curricular decision-making process. The third section, *The evolution and growth of a language program faculty*, maps out a programme for the professional development of teachers, showing how the assignment of teachers’ responsibilities within the curriculum should reflect this development, and also the complex role which evaluation needs to play in this very sensitive area.

The second paper, by Mike Breen, Chris Candlin, Leni Dam and Gerd Gabrielsen, describes the evolution of a series of teacher-training workshops conducted by the authors in Denmark since 1978. The initial aim was to stimulate interest among teachers in new methods and techniques based on communicative approaches to language teaching, but the account of the development of these workshops is less about the achievement of that aim than about achieving a meeting of minds between teachers and teacher trainers. In the first stage (transmission), the target methodology was presented by the trainers on the assumption that it would then be applied. In the process of discovering that ‘transmission’ was largely ineffective, the second stage (problem solving) evolved, whereby the target methodology was offered in response to problems raised by the teachers. Difficulties with this approach led to the third stage in which the workshop has focused upon classroom decision making and investigation. Thus the emphasis has moved from the trainers to the teachers to the learners, and the role of the teacher trainers

as they perceived it changed from 'expert' to problem solver to problem investigator.

Graham Low discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to the organisation and structuring of language teaching materials. In addition to the traditional concerns with presentation of new material, practice designed to give mastery of that material and opportunities for integrating what has been mastered into the learners' established communicative competence, he focuses upon the patterns of organisation within and between course units, discussing past and current approaches, proposing alternatives, and introducing the terms 'feeding' and 'bleeding' to describe relationships which enhance or detract from learning opportunities. Low points out that in many courses in the past there have either been no obvious relationships or else highly contrived ones between units and between the elements within units. Writers have tended to establish sequences of activities which are then followed inflexibly regardless of changes in objectives, topics etc.

Materials of the kind Low criticises have been particularly prevalent in third world countries where the teachers' own English language proficiency and professional training have been weak. The high level of predictability of this approach makes these materials comparatively easy to prepare and use, but it has little else to recommend it. The more radical and experimental approaches generated by the communicative 'revolution' have produced activities that are interesting, interactive and varied, but my own feeling (Ed.) is that the organisational relationships amongst these activities are often still uncertain, more so in fact than in the days of structural syllabuses. In a coherent curriculum the organising principles on which the programme is based need to be stated and understood. Those principles need to go beyond the traditional concern for structural order and vocabulary control to encompass the full range of communicative functions and language skills. 'Feeding' relationships in this broader context are more complex now than in the days of structuralism and audio-lingualism, but no less essential.

Andrew Littlejohn and Scott Windeatt consider the content of the language programme rather than its organisation, and the unintended as well as the intended effects upon learners which may result from the realisation of syllabus specifications as language teaching materials. They acknowledge the difficulty inherent in establishing any direct link between 'input' to the learner and 'uptake' by the learner (a problem discussed in Part IV), but argue that it is possible at least to identify and evaluate what is 'available to be learnt'. This they do under six headings: general or subject knowledge offered in the materials; views of what knowledge is and how it is acquired; views of what is involved in language learning; role relations within the classroom; opportunities for

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the development of cognitive abilities; and the values and attitudes presented in the materials.

In their title, Littlejohn and Windeatt see these issues as going *Beyond language learning...* It seems to me however that, on their own evidence, these issues directly affect both the processes of learning, and the nature of the learners' communicative competence on completion of the programme, and that therefore they constitute essential elements within any discussion of programme implementation.

The further important point emerges that 'mismatch' may exist between the language curriculum and the broader aims of society and education as well as within the curriculum itself. To return to the metaphor of the curriculum as an ecosystem: coherence, like the balance of nature, is necessary but by no means sufficient to ensure an acceptable quality of life for all the participants.

Part IV: Classroom implementation

The fourth set of decisions to be made in the curriculum development process relates to classroom implementation. These decisions determine the nature of the teaching and learning acts that will be performed, with the latter being unarguably the most crucial for the success of the whole of the curricular enterprise. Resourceful, intelligent and determined students achieve their aims in spite of ill-conceived policies, poorly formulated syllabuses, inadequate resources and incompetent teaching. Conversely a well-planned curriculum with appropriate aims effectively realised and implemented achieves little if students are apathetic and unmotivated. This fact in itself explains the inconclusive results of much research and will continue to bedevil curriculum research and evaluation until the role of the learner is acknowledged and, more difficult, taken into account in research design.

The notion of the learner as an empty vessel to be filled by a teacher from a predetermined curriculum has been unacceptable for some time, replaced by the current more positive perception of the active role played by the learner. Nevertheless enthusiasm for various reformulations of syllabuses, and for new styles and methods of materials design and pedagogical presentation has continued largely unconstrained by the growing evidence that learners' aims and the means they adopt to achieve them are not necessarily those of the official curriculum.

In the first paper in this section, David Nunan focuses upon the decisions of the learner, and the evidence from various studies that learners have 'hidden agendas', derived partly from their own aims, partly from their preconceptions about the learning process, and partly from their lack of understanding of the aims of the official curriculum

and the means adopted for achieving those aims. Nunan argues that every aspect of curriculum studies needs to be expanded to include these hidden agendas. In this way, curriculum planning, development, implementation, evaluation and research would take account of learners' perceptions of the learning process as well as those of the theorist, of what happens rather than what ought to happen and of what is learned rather than what is taught. Nunan is particularly concerned with the practical implications of the hidden agenda hypothesis in the classroom, and he proposes techniques for achieving a synthesis between the official curriculum and that of the learner.

One problem inherent in this situation is precisely that the learner's agenda is hidden, and may be inaccessible to the outside observer and indeed to the learner himself. What can be observed however is the interaction between the learner and the learning task. It is here that the official and the hidden agendas come into direct contact, the point at which the learner interacts with, and is able to operate on the curriculum. Mike Breen analyses language learning tasks in terms of three 'phases': the task as workplan (what is intended); as process (what is done); and as outcome (what is achieved). The second is seen as being the most important, the least understood, and as having the most to contribute to language curriculum development. The task evaluation cycle proposed by Breen focuses primarily on this aspect of task, and it aims at involving the learner in the analysis of tasks and in the formulation of proposals for their revision. Like Nunan, Breen sees the role of the teacher as mediator between the curriculum and the learner in a two-way process which revises both the 'agenda' of the learner and the curriculum itself to bring the two into line.

In the last paper in this section, David Stern traces the changes in emphasis in language teaching research from 'Method' as an abstraction to 'natural' learning or 'acquisition' outside the classroom, to the realisation emphasised by the two previous writers that we must come to grips with the process of language curriculum implementation inside the classroom. Stern maintains that classroom research so far has proved of limited value, because it has lacked any explicitly stated theoretical base, and consequently, in the accumulation of a potentially infinite quantity of detail, it has proved difficult if not impossible to see what is and is not important. The theoretical framework which Stern proposes to remedy this situation has three interdependent levels: theoretical concepts, policy directives and classroom behaviour, similar as levels of abstraction to those proposed by Anthony, 1963 (*Approach, method, and technique*) and by Richards and Rodgers, 1986 (*Approach, design, and procedure*). Stern maintains that the findings of classroom research can be interpreted only in so far as they can be related systematically to policy specifications, and the theoretical constructs (or approach) on which the curriculum as a

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whole is based; i.e. it is impossible to evaluate classroom behaviour unless the aim of that behaviour is clear. Similarly, approaches to language teaching and learning cannot be evaluated unless those approaches have been effectively realised in classroom behaviour.

On a personal note, I am very pleased to be able to include this paper by David Stern. I met him in 1987 after many years of admiring his work and was equally impressed by his wisdom and vitality. It was a shock and a great loss to applied linguistics when he died. Very few people have been as successful in '*Seeing the wood AND the trees*', the title of his paper, or have contributed as much to theoretical aspects of language curriculum studies. The Core French project in Canada, which he initiated, is a model of conceptual clarity and attention to detail and seems, at its present stage of development, a near perfect example of coherent language curriculum development.

Part V: Evaluation

In each of the preceding sections, it has been emphasised implicitly if not explicitly that curriculum development and renewal can only proceed effectively if supported by evaluation.

James Brown defines evaluation as the 'systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness and efficiency as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of the particular institutions involved'. He examines key definitions and distinctions within the literature related to language programme evaluation, and the various approaches developed over the past thirty to forty years, culminating in 'decision facilitation approaches'. Brown argues that these developments have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary, each building on what was learned previously. His discussion of the various 'dimensions' of evaluation: formative and summative, product and process, quantitative and qualitative, leads to a set of procedures and steps for developing and implementing language programme evaluation.

Bachman and Hudson focus upon the problem of what should be measured and the means by which measurement should be carried out. Both are dissatisfied with current approaches based on standardised, norm-referenced tests and largely undefined notions of global proficiency or skills. Their approaches are very different however. Bachman is looking towards the future and the point at which evaluation, or at least testing, can be carried out without direct reference to each particular programme under consideration. Hudson's approach is programme-based and he is concerned with practical measures which can be implemented effectively in the light of current knowledge (and the lack of it).

Lyle Bachman's proposals for establishing a theoretical base for criterion-referenced testing are based on generally accepted models of communicative competence. In line with these models, he seeks first to specify a domain of communicative language ability and second to define scales of proficiency at a level of abstraction which makes them independent of contextual features of language use. Criterion-referenced tests based on this model would provide scores that would be comparable across differing sets of instructional objectives, and would provide a valid basis for comparison across language programmes. As Bachman points out, neither the theory nor the tests exist as yet beyond a rudimentary stage of development, and he argues the need for empirical research (rather than arm-chair model building) which will guide test development and at the same time refine and validate the theoretical framework.

Thom Hudson focuses upon student performance, which he considers to be 'the key in evaluation', in terms of student mastery or non-mastery of language programme objectives. Mastery testing establishes absolute rather than relative standards (cf. tests which are intended to rank-order students). It enables the evaluator to determine whether a particular programme has achieved its intended goals, and if not, the areas in which it is deficient. However, these absolute judgements raise in acute form problems which underlie all testing: epistemological (mastery of what), ethical (how will the results be used), and technical (in this case, the problem of the cut-off point which determines whether mastery has or has not been achieved). In dealing with the first of these, Hudson compares two approaches to test data, as a sign of underlying competence, or as a sample of performance. He discusses the implications of each for the definition and demonstration of mastery, with the solution, i.e. which approach to adopt, depending upon the ends and means of the curriculum being evaluated. On the technical (and ethical) question, Hudson takes up the issues of reliability and validity in criterion-referenced measurement. He proposes statistical solutions to the former, but the latter remains problematical, with validity and therefore the ethics of mastery testing having to be argued, again on the basis of the policy and pragmatic constraints of the programme in question.

Warwick Elley's paper provides a down-to-earth conclusion to the collection. It deals with language curriculum evaluation in the broadest sense and as it is rather than as it ideally ought to be; i.e. in situations where few of the desirable prerequisites have been met. The resourceful evaluator needs often to make judgements, to quote Elley: '... about which hallowed principles are essential, which are desirable, what might be feasible under the circumstances, and what is to be avoided at all costs'. He offers pragmatic advice on how to proceed in relation to the choice of evaluator; assessing the importance of the information to be gained; identifying the aims of a programme; selecting the evaluation

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design and the sample; selecting/developing the instruments; administration and marking; the importance of process as well as product; and the analysis of results. His approach suggests that there are very few curriculum situations so hopeless that they cannot be enlightened and improved by a sensible and sensitive evaluator.

For the future, it may be assumed that more rigorous accounts of communicative competence and how it develops will inform the processes of planning, implementation and evaluation of the language curriculum. In the meantime, however, the experience, enthusiasm, tradecraft, careful planning, hard work and good will of all those involved seem to be the primary contributing factors to the achievement of a coherent and successful language curriculum. Whatever theoretical advances are made, the importance of these factors seems unlikely to diminish.