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Teaching Methodology and Curriculum
Development in the Second Language Classroom

Alan G. Harper

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1. Introduction

The concept of syllabus design and its relation to teaching methodology in the second language (L2) classroom has changed considerably over the past few decades. Changes in syllabus development theory can be directly linked to the changes taking place in the methodology of L2 teaching. Initially the concept of syllabus design focused on a one-method system based primarily on grammatical components with the primary concern on selection and grading of material based on the teaching of grammar ; in accordance with the *Grammar Translation Method* .

As teaching methodology changes so does the concept of syllabus design, if the prevailing theory of teaching methodology is based on habit formation then the syllabus may be selected and graded based on the *Audiolingual Method* . If the prevailing theory is based on L2 only in the classroom the syllabus may be selected and graded on the *Direct Method* . (Kehrwald, Mangubhai, 2004 pp. 1. 2-1. 5) Stern (1983, p. 22) suggests the concept of syllabus design based on one method of L2 teaching began to change in the 1960's and 1970's, and brought about a critical analysis of the function of a syllabus by numerous scholars in the 1980's. (Kehrwald, Mangubhai, 2004 p. 1. 5) Breen and Candlin (1980), Widdowson

(1984) and Allen (1983) presented ideas that questioned the previous concept of a syllabus. Breen and Candlin (1980) questioned the idea of a syllabus based on a one method system. Later Candlin (1984) suggested the syllabus could serve as a record of what went on in the classroom. Widdowson (1984) separated the concept of syllabus from the concept of teaching methodology and Allen (1983) suggested the combination of grammatical, communicative and naturalistic language instruction within one syllabus. Stern (1987, p. 22) is critical of the views put forth by Breen and Candlin (1980), Widdowson (1984), Allen (1983) and others, suggesting they focus too much on the *what* of syllabus theory and not on the *who* and *how*. (Kehrwald, Mangubhai, 2004 pp. 1. 5-1. 6) This article will provide an overview of previous research on the relation between syllabus design and teaching methodology, critically analyze the debate, offer a personal view of syllabus design and its relation to teaching methodology and present a sample syllabus based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory used for a beginner level EFL class at Matsuyama University.

2. Overview of Previous Research

There are many reasons why the concept of syllabus design has been the focus of debate in recent decades. The most significant reason may be because the concept of the syllabus itself is subjective and anyone in the L2 education field can interpret the definition according to their needs. One point to consider is the relationship between syllabus design and curriculum design. Nunan (1988 p. 3) states that language curriculum specialists have focused on syllabus design, methodology or assessment and evaluation resulting in a fragmented approach to the overall concept of curriculum design. This fragmented approach sparked criticism from various scholars, Breen and Candlin (1980); Richards (1984) and Nunan

(1985) supported a more comprehensive approach to curriculum design. (Nunan, 1988 p. 3) The relation between syllabus and curriculum design is an important one to consider for L2 educators and educators in general because the former does have an effect on the latter. Candlin (1984) states that curriculum design is concerned with the how a language program is run including administrative issues, language learning, purpose, experience and evaluation as well as the relationship between teachers and students. (Nunan, 1988 p. 3) Syllabus design focuses on keeping records of classroom procedure and results as teachers apply certain aspects of the curriculum to their classroom environment. Records kept in the syllabus can lead to modifications in curriculum design thus redirecting the focus of the language program. (Nunan, 1988 p. 3) In essence a well defined syllabus can determine the purpose and goals of the curriculum in general, however, the concept of the syllabus and its relation to teaching methodology is still open to debate.

There are two basic views regarding syllabus design and its relation to teaching methodology ; the *Broad View* and the *Narrow View*. (Nunan, 1988 p. 5) The broad view discounts the separation between syllabus design and teaching methodology due, in part, to the advent of *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) which makes the distinction difficult to maintain. The narrow view advocates a clear distinction between syllabus design and teaching methodology, syllabus design focuses on the selection and grading of content while teaching methodology focuses on the selection of learning tasks and activities. (Nunan, 1988 p. 5) The central issue is whether a syllabus should focus exclusively on selection and grading of content or should a syllabus specify and guide learning activities in the classroom as well? Stern (1984), Widdowson (1984), Allen (1984) and van Ek (1975) support the narrow approach to syllabus design suggesting a clear distinction between syllabus design and teaching methodology. These scholars

suggest that a syllabus should focus exclusively on the selection and grading of content while teaching methodology should deal with guiding and choosing learning activities in the classroom. (Nunan, 1988 pp.5-6) Candlin (1984), Breen (1984) and Yalden (1984) question the separation of syllabus design and teaching methodology suggesting the *what* and the *how* of a language programme can be one and the same. (Nunan, 1988 pp.6-7) Stern (1987, p.23) outlines four schools of thought that contribute to the debate ; *The Lancaster School*, *The London School*, *Yalden* and *The Toronto School* which reflect the controversy surrounding the separation of syllabus design and teaching methodology.

The Lancaster School, supported by Candlin and Breen, reflects the broad view of syllabus design discounting the notion of a fixed syllabus. Candlin and Breen suggest an open negotiation between teacher and student culminating in a consensus on the appropriate syllabus. Breen acknowledges the concept of a fixed syllabus as a starting point but states the teacher eventually has the last say and designs the syllabus to fit the classroom setting. (Stern, 1987 p.23) The London School is supported by Widdowson and Brumfit and reflects the narrow view of syllabus design. Widdowson advocates some interpretation of the syllabus on the part of the teacher but no negotiation with the students. Widdowson views the syllabus as a fixed document outlining content areas but also allowing for a flexible teaching methodology, which, is the exclusive domain of the teacher. (Stern, 1987 p.24) Yalden supports the narrow view of syllabus design and suggests the syllabus should be the primary blueprint for any language programme. The syllabus should have graded content based on the results of a student needs assessment therefore there is some room for syllabus interpretation on the part of the teacher. (Stern, 1987 p.26) Allen, who supports the Toronto School, leans more towards the narrow view he, like Yalden, is not primarily concerned with the role of the students. Allen's main

concern is the creation of a practical and theoretically relevant syllabus and bases his position on a threefold approach combining *structural-analytical*, *functional-analytical* and *non-analytical* approaches. (Kehrwald, Mangubhai, 2004 p. 2. 12) (Stern, 1987 p, 27)

Allen supports a focus on grammar, discourse features and communicative aspects of language at various points in the language programme determined by the needs of the students and based on their level of proficiency. Allen's view has elements of a broad approach because there is some allowance for interpretation by the teacher but it is closer to the narrow approach as the content of the language programme can be structured and graded according to need and used as an overall blueprint. (Allen, 1983 in Kehrwald, Manguhabai, 2004 p, 2. 12) Stern (1987, p. 28) is critical of the theories supported by Yalden and Allen and sees a definite separation between syllabus design and teaching methodology. Stern (1987, p. 28) considers the *what* of syllabus design (content, structure, parts and organization) and the *who* of syllabus design (curriculum development, implementation, dissemination and evaluation) equally important aspects but separate. In essence Stern's (1987, p. 28) supports the theory that syllabus design should become the responsibility of specialists such as linguists and teaching methodology should be left to the teacher. When examining the relation between syllabus design and teaching methodology it becomes apparent that it is a relation that is difficult to accurately define, although it is possible to offer an opinion on the debate.

3. Critical Analysis

Syllabus : A content of a language programme and how it is organized.

Method : How a language is taught...a set of techniques that usually reflect a certain view of

language teaching

(ESL Glossary, Booglesworld 2004)

According to the ESL glossary syllabus and method are two separate entities reflecting a narrow view of the relation between syllabus design and teaching methodology. It can be said, based on the glossary definitions, organizing the content of a language programme is a straightforward procedure and can be accomplished without much consideration of practical application in the classroom. Conversely the theories of Candlin and Breen (1984) suggest selection of grading and content of a language programme is a matter to be openly discussed between teachers and students which may focus too much on how language teaching material can be used in the classroom without considering theoretical concerns. These two viewpoints represent the extremes of the syllabus design/teaching methodology debate; is there a middle ground? A good place to start would be the concept of needs assessment supported by Yalden and Allen.

First, the needs of the students should be the primary concern when considering the design of a syllabus. The teacher may be the best person to analyze the needs of the students according to their personal theory of language teaching and classroom management. Valdez (1999, p. 32) suggests assessment can be done using standardized tests, interviewing students, discussing classroom issues with other teachers who have previous experience or student observation. Second, how will the syllabus be designed according to various constraints? Constraints, as identified by Todd (1997, p. 20), may include not only the needs of the students but administrative needs as well. Many language programmes identify students as the primary reason for a needs assessment (Munby, 1984 in Todd, 1997, p. 21) other programmes suggest that needs assessment may also include the needs of institutions

and governments. (McDonough, 1984 in Todd, 1997, p. 21) Assessing students' needs may include assessing grammar, functional and communicative skills, assessing institutional and/or government needs may include assessing national policy directives, technology availability, size of classes, current educational philosophy, time allotment etc. (Halim, 1976, Maley, 1984, Robinson, 1991, Swales, 1989 in Todd, 1997, p. 21) all are important considerations when designing a language programme. There are two questions to consider when analyzing needs assessment, first who is the best qualified to assess students', institutional and government needs? Second, who should be responsible for the practical use of the syllabus in the classroom, the teacher, a linguistic specialist or administrative staff? The following is a personal opinion of syllabus design based on some of the theories presented in this article.

It is important to conduct a student needs assessment in order to gauge their language proficiency using methods suggested by Valdez (1997, p. 32), a complete negotiation on syllabus design with students, as suggested by Candlin and Breen (1984), may be a good idea in theory but impractical in a real life situation. Todd (1997, p. 22) outlines practical problems of needs assessment, involving student consultation, encountered when designing an English coursework structure for Information Technology students at a university in Bangkok Thailand,

“...conducting a needs analysis of learners was not possible, because at the time of the course design the Masters degree in IT had not opened, so the perspective students were an unknown quantity.” (Todd 1997, p. 22)

Todd's experience with needs assessment represents one practical problem, how does one assess the needs of students if they are not present? One way to solve

this problem would be for the institution to conduct interviews of pre-enrolling students and prepare profiles that provide information necessary for a needs assessment and have the teacher and/or administration staff conduct another needs assessment at a later date. Regarding the issue of the relation between syllabus and methodology a favourable approach might be Widdowson's and Allen's theory of a structurally sound syllabus with enough latitude for interpretation on the part of the teacher. The line between syllabus design and methodology can be defined but there are overlaps. In theory combined input by the the teacher, linguistic specialist and administrative staff on design procedure would produce a relatively effective syllabus although this combination may be difficult to achieve in practical terms.

With respect to methodology, Stern's suggestion that it should be the exclusive domain of the teacher is a personal preference. If the syllabus has to be designed with input from the teacher, linguistic specialist and administrative staff then it should include enough room for interpretation on the part of the teacher. As most teachers know the syllabus sometimes needs to be adjusted to work practically in the classroom. A personal preference for syllabus design would be in the middle of the narrow/broad view spectrum but closer to the narrow approach ; content, structure, parts and organization could be a culmination of ideas from different sources involved in the language programme. The implementation, dissemination and evaluation should be left in the hands of the teacher as they are the ones who will eventually deal with the problems that will arise in the classroom. The student's role is to study and eventually acquire L2 to the best of their ability ; the contribution they make to syllabus design is represented in the needs assessment.

4. Sample Syllabus Based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Theory

In order to illustrate a personal preference for syllabus design and how it relates to teaching methodology and curriculum development a review of a sample syllabus would be helpful. The syllabus presented in Appendix A was used in the *English for Travelling Abroad Class* semester 2, 2009 at Matsuyama University. The 90 minute class consisted of 65 students with beginner level English proficiency the textbook used was *Travel Abroad Project*. (McMahon, 2005) and the course objective was for students to plan a trip to a foreign country of their choice. Students were required to take a general English proficiency test (needs assessment) at the beginning of the school year (April 1st), in this case the process of needs assessment is clearly the responsibility of the institution (Matsuyama University) with no input from the teacher.

Syllabus development and implementation for English for Travelling Abroad was entirely the responsibility of the teacher, A. G. Harper, and was developed with no consultation with the students or administration staff but some consultation with other faculty members, this approach allowed for flexibility when it came to designing the syllabus, (and to) evaluation and content selection. The syllabus follows each unit of the text and was based on *process-based CLT approach* focusing on *content-based instruction* (CBI) and *task-based instruction* (TBI). (Richards, 2006 p. 27)

“CBI is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teaching the language itself separately from the content being taught.”

(Krahnke, 1987, p. 65 in Richards, 2006, p. 27)

CBI is based on several assumptions, first, people learn a language more efficiently when they use the language as a means to acquire information, second, CBI can better reflect a student's need for learning L2 and third the content studied can provide a comprehensive framework which can be used to develop language skills. (Richards, 2006, p. 28) Task-based instruction focuses on specially designed instructional tasks which promote interactional processes and lead to language learning. (Richards, 2006, p. 30) The English for Travelling Abroad syllabus (Appendix A) includes a brief explanation of tasks as they pertain to the theories of TBI. The tasks used for English for Travelling Abroad consist of mostly real world tasks (reflecting real world language use) with some pedagogical tasks (interactional strategies focusing on specific language skills). (Richards, 2006, p. 31) To get a better understanding of the activities presented in the English for Travelling Abroad syllabus (Appendix A) it may be necessary to review the textbook used in the class. Since it is impractical to present the entire text in this article please refer to the text itself (see reference page for text info). The tasks in the sample syllabus (Appendix A) are identified according to type.

The syllabus developed for English for Travelling Abroad (Appendix A) reflects a personal preference of teaching methodology. In accordance with Matsuyama University policy syllabus development, implementation, evaluation, content and text selection is the sole responsibility of the teacher for most classes reflecting Nunan's (1988, p. 5) broad view of the relation between syllabus design and teaching methodology. For the English for Travelling Abroad class there were three teachers teaching the same course during the semester, some consultation with other teachers on class procedure was discussed and the text was chosen by one teacher but teaching methodology was left up to the individual teachers. In general the syllabus presented in Appendix A worked well in the classroom and was generally

well received by the students. The main drawback of the English for Travelling Abroad course was the English language proficiency of a majority of the students enrolled and the class size. A review of the text *Travel Abroad Project* (McMahon, 2005) shows that it is structured toward upper intermediate or advanced students. As most of the students enrolled in English for Travelling Abroad were beginner or lower beginner level students most of the material was well above their proficiency level making it difficult for them to complete class assignments. The class size (65 students) was too large for the teacher to efficiently monitor student activities which is crucial especially for lower level students this class would work well with a smaller class size (25 students) of upper intermediate or advanced levels. The issue of class size and level testing falls within the category of curriculum development and should be the responsibility of the administration staff of Matsuyama University in accordance with the opinions of Halim, (1976), Maley, (1984), Robinson, (1991) and Swales, (1989) (cited in Todd, 1997, p. 21).

5. Conclusion

As suggested in this article the concept of syllabus design is subjective and therefore open to interpretation although it is possible to come to a consensus on the most appropriate idea for syllabus design and use of the syllabus in the classroom. First it is important to look at the relation between syllabus design and curriculum development if the syllabus serves as a record of classroom procedure, as suggested by Nunan (1988, p. 3), then it may lead to a more efficiently planned curriculum. Second it is important to decide where to draw the line between syllabus design and teaching methodology and to clarify personal views of what constitutes a well designed and efficient syllabus. There are various views on the relation of syllabus design to teaching methodology Nunan (1988, p. 3) divides these views into two

main categories, the narrow and the broad views. The narrow view advocates a separation between syllabus design and teaching methodology and the broad view advocates an overlap between the two.

Stern (1987, p. 23) outlines four schools of thought, *The Lancaster School*, *The London School*, *Yalden* and *The Toronto School*, that contribute to the debate over areas of syllabus design and teaching methodology. A syllabus that separates areas of design and methodology to some extent but allows for some degree of overlap is a personal preference. When the content, structure and organization of the syllabus is a combined effort by the teacher and administrative staff, and if possible a linguistic specialist, it may produce an effective syllabus from all perspectives although it may be difficult to produce that kind of input in a real life situation. Teaching methodology should be the domain of the teacher; while consultation with colleagues on method procedure may be necessary the final say on teaching methodology and implementation should be the teachers'. The needs of the student should be assessed in order to establish proficiency levels allowing the teacher to consider appropriate methodological procedure. Student needs assessment should fall under the category of curriculum design and be the responsibility of the institution however input from the teacher in this area would be helpful.

The sample syllabus for the English for Travelling Abroad class at Matsuyama University presented in this article is an example of a personal preference to syllabus design and teaching methodology and represents a syllabus designed in the middle of the broad and narrow view spectrum. The syllabus based on CBI and TBI and following general CLT theory was developed by the teacher and worked well with about half of the students in the class. Real world and pedagogical tasks allowed the students to engage in meaningful L2 speaking practice. In this case syllabus

design and teaching methodology were one in the same reflecting the broad view of this relation presented by Nunan (1988, p. 5). The sample syllabus' relation to the general English language curriculum at Matsuyama University does not entirely reflect the views of Nunan (1988, p. 3) according to personal experience teaching the class. Input from the teachers involved with the course based on classroom methodology might lead to changes in curriculum design and improve the quality of the course, up to this point there has been no request from the university for curriculum input based on syllabus design. If more attention was paid to class size and student proficiency on the part of administration staff perhaps from teacher recommendations it may result in a more efficient class with better results for the students, the teacher and the university.

As noted the concept of syllabus design and its relation to teaching methodology has changed considerably over the past few decades due to changes taking place within the area of teaching methodology. CLT, emerged in the 1970 s as an option to traditional language teaching methodology and has become a prominent methodology in English second language teaching today. (Richards, 2006, p. 9) CLT has been a preferable personal teaching methodology for a number of years and has produced positive results in many classroom situations. CLT has worked for me when the syllabus was designed by a number of sources and implemented by the teacher or designed and implemented exclusively by the teacher. It is recommended that a syllabus designed for the most part by the teacher with some input from administrative and faculty members and implemented exclusively by the teacher with regard to activity choices can serve as an effective syllabus. A year end meeting with faculty and administration staff would allow results to be analyzed and recommendation to future curriculum development could be made at this time. This combination may result in a better learning environment for the

students and the teacher and a better bottom line for the institution.

Appendix A (1)

**This is a sample from the original syllabus with a few selected weeks. The activities presented in the selected weeks are generally representative of the complete syllabus. Please refer to the text for a detailed description of activities.*

English For Travelling Abroad : Fall 2009

Week 1 September 24th

1. Review Class information

-Textbook-Travel Abroad Project

-Class Objective : Planning a trip to a foreign country of your choice

-Class Evaluation : Travel Journal-40% ; 4 In class presentations-40% ;
Attendance, Participation, Homework-20% Total-100%

2. Student/Teacher introductions-What are some common questions you ask someone when you meet them for the first time? Make a list and introduce yourself to your classmates.

-Ask the teacher the same questions-**group work-real world task**

3. Teacher lists continents on the board and students list as many countries as they can for each continent. **group work -real world task. -listing task**

Week 2 October 1

1. Students form groups of 4 or 5 members

2. Unit 1 p. 4-Key Vocabulary-**group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise**

3. Unit 1 p. 4-Preview-**group work-pedagogical task-listening and reading skills**

4. Unit 1-p. 4-Are You Ready? -**group work-real world task-discussion**

5. Unit 1 p. 5-Talk About It-**group work-real world task-listing task**

6. Unit 1-p. 7-Bonus-To Do or Not to Do-group work-real world task-listing task

Week 3 October 8

1. Students form groups of 4 or 5 members
2. Unit 2-p. 8-Key Vocabulary-group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise
3. Unit 2-p. 8-Preview-group work-pedagogical task-listening and reading skills
4. Unit 2-p. 8-Are You Ready ? -group work-real world task-discussion
5. Unit 2-p. 9-Planning a Trip-group work-real world task-discussion
6. Unit 2-p. 9-Country Shortlist-group work-real world task-listing and discussion

Appendix A (2)

7. Unit 2-p. 9-Your Target Country-group work-real world task-discussion

Week 4 October 22

1. Students form groups of 4 or 5 members
2. Unit 3-p. 12-Key Vocabulary-group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise
3. Unit 3-p. 12-Preview-group work-pedagogical task-listening and reading skills
4. Unit 3-p. 12-Are You Ready ? -group work-real world task-discussion
5. Unit 3-p. 13-Travel Topics-group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise
6. Unit 3-p. 13-Infosearch-group work-real world task-internet research and discussion

Week 5 October 29

1. Unit 4-p. 16-Presentation #1-**group work-real world task-presentation skills**
 - Students form groups of 5 members
 - Each group member has 5 minutes for their presentation
 - Other group members evaluate the presentation using the Evaluation sheet p. 18
2. Unit 5-p. 20-Key Vocabulary-**group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise**
3. Unit 5-p. 20-Preview -**group work-pedagogical task-listening and reading skills**
4. Unit 5-p. 20-Are You Ready? -**group work-real world task-discussion**
5. Unit 5-p. 21-The Arts-**group work-pedagogical task-vocabulary exercise**
6. Unit 5-p. 21-Talk About It-**group work-real world task-listing and discussion**

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