

ELT CURRICULUM AND MATERIAL PRODUCTION **Curriculum, Syllabus, and ELT Approaches**

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Kerr defines curriculum as “all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school” (quoted in Kelly 1983: 10; see also, Kelly 1999). This gives us some basis to move on - and for the moment all we need to do is highlight two of the key features: “planned” and “guided.” There are four ways of approaching curriculum theory and practice: (1) curriculum as a body of knowledge to be submitted, (2) curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students-product, (3) curriculum as process, and (4) curriculum as praxis.

1. Curriculum as a body of knowledge to be transmitted

An approach to curriculum theory and practice which focuses on syllabus is only really concerned with content. Curriculum is a body of knowledge-content and/or subjects. Education in this sense is the process by which these are “transmitted” or “delivered” to students by the most effective methods that can be devised (Blenkin et al 1992: 23).

2. Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students - product

There are a number of issues with this approach to curriculum theory and practice. The first is that the plan or programme assumes great importance. Second, there are questions around the nature of objectives. This model is hot on measurability. It implies that behaviour can be objectively, mechanistically measured. Third, there is a real problem when we come to examine what educators actually do in the classroom. And fourth is the problem of unanticipated results. The focus on pre-specified goals may lead both educators and learners to overlook learning that is occurring as a result of their

interactions, but which is not listed as an objective.

3. Curriculum as process

The curriculum, essentially, is a set of documents for implementation. Another way of looking at curriculum theory and practice is through the process. In this sense, curriculum is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction of teachers, students, and knowledge. In other words, curriculum is what actually happens in the classroom and what people do to prepare and evaluate. What we have in this model is a number of elements in constant interaction. It is an active process and links with the practical form of reasoning set out by Aristotle.

4. Curriculum as praxis

Curriculum as praxis, in many respects, is a development of the process model. While the process model is driven by general principles and places an emphasis on judgment and meaning making, it does not make explicit statements about the interests it serves. The praxis model of curriculum theory and practice brings these to the centre of the process and makes an explicit commitment to emancipation. Thus action is not simply informed, it is also committed. In this approach, the curriculum itself develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection. That is, the curriculum is not simply a set of plans to be implemented, but rather is constituted through an active process in which planning, acting, and evaluating are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process (Grundy 1987: 115).

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2. Grundy, S. (1987). *Curriculum: product or praxis?* Lewes: Falmer Press.
3. Blenkin, G. M. et al (1992) *Change and the Curriculum*, London: Paul Chapman.

SYLLABUS

Students need to learn in the language classroom depends on organizing a global order of presentation. Therefore, teacher must plan and organize, then make decision about what should be taught first, second, third, and so on. McKay (1978) uses the term syllabus in a special way that seems to apply. A syllabus provides a focus for what should be studied, along with a rationale for how that content should be selected and ordered.”

Types of syllabus based on McKay (1978) in Brown (1995):

a. Structural Syllabus

Structural syllabus focuses on grammatical form. Through the structural syllabus, the sequencing of structures is typically based on idea of starting with easy structures and gradually progressing to more difficult ones. In some cases, the sequencing starts with the most frequently occurring structures and gradually moves to the less frequently occurring ones. Following the easy-to-difficult rationale for tenses, for example, a textbook might begin with the present tense, then move on to the future tense, then introduce the past forms, then the past perfect, and so on.

b. Situational Syllabus

Situational syllabus is based on the idea that language is found in different context or situations. Consequently, the organizing in a situational syllabus will be based on common situation like the following: *at a party, at the beach, at a tourist shop, at the airport, at a theatre, in a taxi*, and the like. The selection of situations is usually based on some feeling for the likelihood that the students will encounter such situations. The sequencing usually moves from situation to situation based on

chronology or the relative likelihood that students will encounter the situations in question.

c. *Topical Syllabus*

Topical syllabus is similar to situational syllabus. However, it is organized by topics or themes, rather than situations. Typically, the topics are selected by the textbook author on basis of her or his sense of the importance of the topics or themes to the lives of students for whom the text is designed. Such syllabuses often include happy topics, such as *divorce, single parents, abortion, disaster, and so on.*

d. *Functional Syllabus*

McKay identified a category of syllabus, called *functional syllabus*, which focuses on semantic use. Functional syllabus is more correctly designation to the principle around the material organized. For instance, an English course in an adult school in Holland might be designed to teach general purpose social English and be organized around language function like *seeking information, interruption, and the like.* Basically, the author select functions on the basis of their perceived usefulness to the students and then sequence them on the basis of some idea of chronology, frequency, or hierarchy of usefulness of the functions.

e. *Notional Syllabus*

A related class of syllabuses that could best be labeled notional syllabus. Notional syllabus is organized around abstract conceptual categories, called general notions. General notions include concepts like *distance, duration, quantity, quality, location, size,* and so on. This type of materials organization is related to functional organization and on occasion serves as a general set of categories within which functions form subcategories. The material selects the general notions based on its perceived utility and sequences according to chronology, frequency, or the utility of the notions involved.

f. *Skills-Based Syllabus*

A skills-based syllabus organizes materials around the language or academic skills that he or she thinks the students will most need in order to use and continue to learn the language. For example, *reading for specific information, guessing vocabulary from context, finding main ideas, and the like.* The selection

skills is based on the author's perception of their usefulness, while the sequencing is usually based on some sense of chronology, frequency, or relative usefulness of the skills.

g. Task-Based Syllabus

Task-based syllabus organizes materials around different types of tasks that the students might be required to perform in the language. For instance, *reading job ads, making appointments, solving a problem, and so on*. An author selection of the tasks to be included in a task-based syllabus is typically based on their perceived usefulness to the students.

What is an Effective Syllabus?

According to Nunan, an effective syllabus conveys what the class will be like, what students will do and learn, as well as what they can expect of you. A well designed syllabus achieves the following:

- It increases the likelihood of student success in your class. It guides student learning in accordance with expectations and demonstrates to students that you care about their learning.
- It decreases the number of problems which arise in the course.
- It assists in our professional development. Writing and revising our syllabi provide us the reoccurring opportunity to reflect on both the form and purpose of our approach to teaching such questions as: Why do I select the content I do? Should I present the content in this order? Are these the best teaching strategies for this course? Is there a better way to evaluate achievement?
- It tacitly records and transmits your teaching philosophy. The syllabus is a public document. When you are up for tenure or a promotion, your colleagues look to your syllabus for information about how you teach.
- It provides pertinent information about your course to your colleagues and department. For example, colleagues who teach subsequent courses in your department will be able to make assumptions about what students who took your course know and are able to do.

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ELT APPROACHES

Brown suggests that he consider the various language teaching activities in terms closer to what language teachers and students actually do. Every teacher enters the classroom with some idea of what the students need to learn. Most trained teachers will have a more theoretically motivated idea of what their students need to learn. Teachers begin with preconceptions that often change after they enter the classroom and begin to work with their students. The preconceptions, assumptions, and theoretical underpinnings for what happens in the classroom will be lumped together in *approach*. Types of approach in language teaching based on Brown (1995):

a. Classical Approach

Based on notions of Latin usage and belief in humanistic tradition, teachers felt that students need education as a whole was to read, translate, and memorize various bits and pieces of text in the target language

b. Grammar-Translation Approach

Another strain of thought on when the time of World War I, the notion of perspective grammar is valuable into grammar-translation approach which advocated economy of time through deductive teaching of language involving reading and translation, but also emergence of writing and speaking as ultimate goals.

c. Direct Approach

It is also a view based on perspective grammar by drawing on the work directly and on gestalt psychology. By the way, teachers believe that students need to learn inductively by using only the target language in the classroom and learning the oral skills (listening and speaking) before the written ones.

d. Audiolingual Approach

It draws on new ideas from descriptive linguistics and upon the notions of behavioral psychology, especially the ideas of operant conditioning and behavioral modification. The view of what students need consisted of inductive learning, primarily of listening and speaking through habit formation based on stimulus-response exercises like pattern and transformation drills.

e. Communicative Approach

Increasingly important views that students need to learn to communicate their own personal intentions. It focuses on the need for students to express meaning that are important to them and their lives. It also assumes that language teaching can utilize both inductive and deductive learning.

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