

■ EDITORS: C N CANDLIN & H

L | A | N | G | U | A | G | E
T | E | A | C | H | I | N | G

■ A SCHEME FOR TEACHER EDUCATION ■

Syllabus Design

DAVID NUNAN

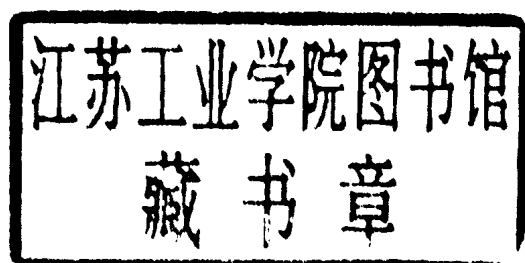
O | X | F | O | R | D | U | N | I | V | E | R | S | I | T | Y | P | R | E | S | S

Language Teaching:
A Scheme for Teacher Education

Editors: C N Candlin and H G Widdowso

Syllabus Design

David Nunan



Oxford University Press

Oxford University Press
Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bombay
Calcutta Cape Town Dar es Salaam Delhi
Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madras Madrid Melbourne
Mexico City Nairobi Paris Singapore
Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

OXFORD and OXFORD ENGLISH are
trade marks of Oxford University Press

ISBN 0 19 437139 5

© Oxford University Press 1988

First published 1988
Sixth impression 1996

No unauthorized photocopying

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Oxford University Press.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Printed in Hong Kong
Typeset by Wyvern Typesetting Ltd, Bristol

The author and series editors

David Nunan is Director of the English Centre and Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Hong Kong. He has worked as an ESL/EFL teacher, researcher, curriculum developer, and materials writer in many parts of the world including Australia, Oman, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and the UK. He has published books on language teaching curriculum development, discourse analysis, second language teacher education, language teaching methodology, and research methods in applied linguistics.

Christopher N. Candlin is Professor and Chair of Linguistics in the School of English and Linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney, and Executive Director of the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, having previously been Professor of Applied Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Language in Social Life at the University of Lancaster. He also co-founded and directed the Institute for English Language Education at Lancaster.

Henry Widdowson is Professor of English for Speakers of Other Languages at the University of London Institute of Education, and Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex. He was previously Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, and has also worked as an English Language Officer for The British Council in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Through work with The British Council, The Council of Europe, and other agencies, both Editors have had extensive and varied experience of language teaching, teacher education, and curriculum development overseas, and both contribute to seminars, conferences, and professional journals.

Introduction

Syllabus Design

The purpose of this book is to provide teachers with tools and techniques for analysing and subjecting to critical scrutiny the syllabuses with which they are working. It is also intended to provide concepts and procedures for those teachers who are in a position to take part in the development of their own syllabuses.

Section One begins with an examination of the concepts of 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'. The rest of the section is concerned with central issues relating to the selection and grading of input in language syllabus design. Concepts and procedures which are examined include needs analysis, goal and objective setting, the selection and grading of content, and the selection and grading of learning tasks.

Section Two closely parallels Section One. Here we shall look at the ways in which the concepts and principles presented in Section One have been applied in practice. Samples of syllabuses and course materials from a range of resources are presented and criticized. The aims of Section Two are as follows:

- 1 to examine the ways in which the principles set out in Section One have been utilized in syllabus design
- 2 to provide examples of syllabus design tools, outlines, and planning procedures
- 3 to provide readers with the opportunity to analyse and assess critically a range of syllabus planning tools, designs, and procedures.

In Section Three, readers are encouraged to apply the ideas developed in Sections One and Two to their own teaching situation. The general aim of the section is to encourage readers to deepen their understanding of the teaching context in which they work. In particular, it is hoped that the tasks will help readers develop a critical attitude towards the syllabus or syllabuses which shape their teaching programmes, and to help them identify ways in which they might modify, adapt, or improve the syllabus or syllabuses with which they work.

Although this book is principally concerned with the selection and grading of input, it is important for syllabus design to be seen as an integral part of the total curriculum. In the course of the book we shall see that syllabus designers are currently facing a dilemma over the relationship between

syllabus design and methodology. We shall see that the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology becomes difficult to sustain if it is accepted that syllabus design should include the specification of learning tasks and activities.

In attempting to deepen our understanding of language learning and teaching, we may take as our point of departure an analysis of linguistic description at one or more of the levels of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, or discourse. Alternatively, we may begin with one or more of the macroskills of listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Finally, we may begin with one or more aspects of teaching, including syllabus design, methodology, task design, content teaching, or evaluation. It is difficult to proceed in any of these areas, however, without taking into consideration the other areas to which it is related. For this reason, this book has been extensively cross-referenced to other volumes in the Scheme. The single most important message in this book is that the effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of language learning and teaching requires an integrated approach in which all the aspects covered in the series are interrelated.

I should like to thank the series editors, Chris Candlin and Henry Widdowson, for the great deal of assistance, guidance, and advice they provided during the writing of this book. Needless to say, the views expressed and the conclusions reached are my own and should not necessarily be attributed to the series editors. Any shortcomings in the book are also mine.

David Nunan

Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education

The purpose of this scheme of books is to engage language teachers in a process of continual professional development. We have designed it so as to guide teachers towards the critical appraisal of ideas and the informed application of these ideas in their own classrooms. The scheme provides the means for teachers to take the initiative themselves in pedagogic planning. The emphasis is on critical enquiry as a basis for effective action.

We believe that advances in language teaching stem from the independent efforts of teachers in their own classrooms. This independence is not brought about by imposing fixed ideas and promoting fashionable formulas. It can only occur where teachers, individually or collectively, explore principles and experiment with techniques. Our purpose is to offer guidance on how this might be achieved.

The scheme consists of three sub-series of books covering areas of enquiry and practice of immediate relevance to language teaching and learning. Sub-series 1 focuses on areas of *language knowledge*, with books linked to the conventional levels of linguistic description: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Sub-series 2 focuses on different *modes of behaviour* which realize this knowledge. It is concerned with the pedagogic skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Sub-series 3 focuses on a variety of *modes of action* which are needed if this knowledge and behaviour is to be acquired in the operation of language teaching. The books in this sub-series have to do with such topics as syllabus design, the content of language courses, and aspects of methodology, and evaluation.

This sub-division of the field is not meant to suggest that different topics can be dealt with in isolation. On the contrary, the concept of a scheme implies making coherent links between all these different areas of enquiry and activity. We wish to emphasize how their integration formalizes the complex factors present in any teaching process. Each book, then, highlights a particular topic, but also deals contingently with other issues, themselves treated as focal in other books in the series. Clearly, an enquiry into a mode of behaviour like speaking, for example, must also refer to aspects of language knowledge which it realizes. It must also connect to modes of action which can be directed at developing this behaviour in learners. As elements of the whole scheme, therefore, books cross-refer both within and across the different sub-series.

This principle of cross-reference which links the elements of the scheme is also applied to the internal design of the different interrelated books within it. Thus, each book contains three sections, which, by a combination of text and task, engage the reader in a principled enquiry into ideas and practices. The first section of each book makes explicit those theoretical ideas which bear on the topic in question. It provides a conceptual framework for those sections which follow. Here the text has a mainly *explanatory* function, and the tasks serve to clarify and consolidate the points raised. The second section shifts the focus of attention to how the ideas from Section One relate to activities in the classroom. Here the text is concerned with *demonstration*, and the tasks are designed to get readers to evaluate suggestions for teaching in reference both to the ideas from Section One and also to their own teaching experience. In the third section this experience is projected into future work. Here the set of tasks, modelled on those in Section Two, are designed to be carried out by the reader as a combination of teaching techniques and action research in the actual classroom. It is this section that renews the reader's contact with reality: the ideas expounded in Section One and linked to pedagogic practice in Section Two are now to be systematically *tested out* in the process of classroom teaching.

If language teaching is to be a genuinely professional enterprise, it requires continual experimentation and evaluation on the part of practitioners

whereby in seeking to be more effective in their pedagogy they provide at the same time — and as a corollary — for their own continuing education. It is our aim in this scheme to promote this dual purpose.

Christopher N. Candlin
Henry Widdowson

Contents

The author and series editors	vi
Introduction	vii
Section One: Defining syllabus design	1
1 The scope of syllabus design	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 A general curriculum model	4
1.3 Defining 'syllabus'	5
1.4 The role of the classroom teacher	7
1.5 Conclusion	8
2 Points of departure	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Basic orientations	11
2.3 Learning purpose	13
2.4 Learning goals	24
2.5 Conclusion	25
3 Product-oriented syllabuses	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Analytic and synthetic syllabus planning	27
3.3 Grammatical syllabuses	28
3.4 Criticizing grammatical syllabuses	30
3.5 Functional-notional syllabuses	35
3.6 Criticizing functional-notional syllabuses	36
3.7 Analytic syllabuses	37
3.8 Conclusion	39
4 Process-oriented syllabuses	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Procedural syllabuses	42
4.3 Task-based syllabuses	44

4.4	Content syllabuses	48
4.5	The natural approach	51
4.6	Syllabus design and methodology	52
4.7	Grading tasks	54
4.8	Conclusion	60
5	Objectives	61
5.1	Introduction	61
5.2	Types of objective	61
5.3	Performance objectives in language teaching	63
5.4	Criticizing performance objectives	67
5.5	Process and product objectives	69
5.6	Conclusion	71
	Section Two: Demonstrating syllabus design	73
6	Needs and goals	75
6.1	Introduction	75
6.2	Needs analysis	75
6.3	From needs to goals	79
6.4	Conclusion	84
7	Selecting and grading content	85
7.1	Introduction	85
7.2	Selecting grammatical components	86
7.3	Selecting functional and notional components	87
7.4	Relating grammatical, functional, and notional components	87
7.5	Grading content	92
7.6	Conclusion	95
8	Selecting and grading learning tasks	96
8.1	Introduction	96
8.2	Goals, objectives, and tasks	96
8.3	Procedural syllabuses	98
8.4	The natural approach	102
8.5	Content-based syllabuses	104
8.6	Levels of difficulty	107
8.7	Teaching grammar as process	118
8.8	Conclusion	121

9	Selecting and grading objectives	122
9.1	Introduction	122
9.2	Product-oriented objectives	122
9.3	Process-oriented objectives	131
9.4	Conclusion	133
	Section Three: Exploring syllabus design	135
10	General principles	137
10.1	Curriculum and syllabus models	137
10.2	Purposes and goals	140
10.3	Syllabus products	144
10.4	Experiential content	147
10.5	Tasks and activities	149
10.6	Objectives	153
	Glossary	159
	Further reading	161
	Bibliography	162
	Index	166

SECTION ONE

Defining syllabus design

1 The scope of syllabus design

1.1 Introduction

We will start by outlining the scope of syllabus design and relating it to the broader field of curriculum development. Later, in 1.4, we shall also look at the role of the teacher in syllabus design.

Within the literature, there is some confusion over the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'. It would, therefore, be as well to give some indication at the outset of what is meant here by syllabus, and also how syllabus design is related to curriculum development.

► TASK 1

As a preliminary activity, write a short definition of the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'.

In language teaching, there has been a comparative neglect of systematic curriculum development. In particular, there have been few attempts to apply, in any systematic fashion, principles of curriculum development to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of language programmes. Language curriculum specialists have tended to focus on only part of the total picture — some specializing in syllabus design, others in methodology, and yet others in assessment and evaluation. In recent years this rather fragmented approach has been criticized, and there have been calls for a more comprehensive approach to language curriculum design (see, for example, Breen and Candlin 1980; Richards 1984; Nunan 1985). The present book is intended to provide teachers with the skills they need to address, in a systematic fashion, the problems and tasks which confront them in their programme planning.

Candlin (1984) suggests that curricula are concerned with making general statements about language learning, learning purpose and experience, evaluation, and the role relationships of teachers and learners. According to Candlin, they will also contain banks of learning items and suggestions about how these might be used in class. Syllabuses, on the other hand, are more localized and are based on accounts and records of what actually happens at the classroom level as teachers and learners apply a given curriculum to their own situation. These accounts can be used to make subsequent modifications to the curriculum, so that the developmental process is ongoing and cyclical.

1.2 A general curriculum model

► TASK 2

Examine the following planning tasks and decide on the order in which they might be carried out.

- monitoring and assessing student progress
- selecting suitable materials
- stating the objectives of the course
- evaluating the course
- listing grammatical and functional components
- designing learning activities and tasks
- instructing students
- identifying topics, themes, and situations

It is possible to study 'the curriculum' of an educational institution from a number of different perspectives. In the first instance we can look at curriculum planning, that is at decision making, in relation to identifying learners' needs and purposes; establishing goals and objectives; selecting and grading content; organizing appropriate learning arrangements and learner groupings; selecting, adapting, or developing appropriate materials, learning tasks, and assessment and evaluation tools.

Alternatively, we can study the curriculum 'in action' as it were. This second perspective takes us into the classroom itself. Here we can observe the teaching/learning process and study the ways in which the intentions of the curriculum planners, which were developed during the planning phase, are translated into action.

Yet another perspective relates to assessment and evaluation. From this perspective, we would try and find out what students had learned and what they had failed to learn in relation to what had been planned. Additionally, we might want to find out whether they had learned anything which had not been planned. We would also want to account for our findings, to make judgements about why some things had succeeded and others had failed, and perhaps to make recommendations about what changes might be made to improve things in the future.

Finally, we might want to study the management of the teaching institution, looking at the resources available and how these are utilized, how the institution relates to and responds to the wider community, how constraints imposed by limited resources and the decisions of administrators affect what happens in the classroom, and so on.

All of these perspectives taken together represent the field of curriculum study. As we can see, the field is a large and complex one.

It is important that, in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a given curriculum, all elements be integrated, so that decisions made at one

level are not in conflict with those made at another. For instance, in courses based on principles of communicative language teaching, it is important that these principles are reflected, not only in curriculum documents and syllabus plans, but also in classroom activities, patterns of classroom interaction, and in tests of communicative performance.

1.3 Defining 'syllabus'

There are several conflicting views on just what it is that distinguishes syllabus design from curriculum development. There is also some disagreement about the nature of 'the syllabus'. In books and papers on the subject, it is possible to distinguish a broad and a narrow approach to syllabus design.

The narrow view draws a clear distinction between syllabus design and methodology. Syllabus design is seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content, while methodology is concerned with the selection of learning tasks and activities. Those who adopt a broader view question this strict separation, arguing that with the advent of communicative language teaching the distinction between content and tasks is difficult to sustain.

The following quotes have been taken from Brumfit (1984) which provides an excellent overview of the range and diversity of opinion on syllabus design. The broad and narrow views are both represented in the book, as you will see from the quotes.

► TASK 3

As you read the quotes, see whether you can identify which writers are advocating a broad approach and which a narrow approach.

- 1 . . . I would like to draw attention to a distinction . . . between curriculum or syllabus, that is its content, structure, parts and organisation, and, . . . what in curriculum theory is often called curriculum processes, that is curriculum development, implementation, dissemination and evaluation. The former is concerned with the WHAT of curriculum: what the curriculum is like or should be like; the latter is concerned with the WHO and HOW of establishing the curriculum.

(*Stern 1984: 10–11*)

- 2 [The syllabus] replaces the concept of 'method', and the syllabus is now seen as an instrument by which the teacher, with the help of the syllabus designer, can achieve a degree of 'fit' between the needs and aims of the learner (as social being and as individual) and the activities which will take place in the classroom.

(*Yalden 1984: 14*)

- 3 ... the syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken.
(Widdowson 1984: 26)
- 4 We might ... ask whether it is possible to separate so easily what we have been calling content from what we have been calling method or procedure, or indeed whether we can avoid bringing evaluation into the debate?
(Candlin 1984: 32)
- 5 Any syllabus will express—however indirectly—certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning, and about the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom.
(Breen 1984: 49)
- 6 ... curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology).
(Allen 1984: 61)
- 7 Since language is highly complex and cannot be taught all at the same time, successful teaching requires that there should be a selection of material depending on the prior definition of objectives, proficiency level, and duration of course. This selection takes place at the syllabus planning stage.
(*op. cit.*: 65)

As you can see, some language specialists believe that syllabus (the selection and grading of content) and methodology should be kept separate; others think otherwise. One of the issues you will have to decide on as you work through this book is whether you think syllabuses should be defined solely in terms of the selection and grading of content, or whether they should also attempt to specify and grade learning tasks and activities.

Here, we shall take as our point of departure the rather traditional notion that a syllabus is a statement of content which is used as the basis for planning courses of various kinds, and that the task of the syllabus designer is to select and grade this content. To begin with, then, we shall distinguish between syllabus design, which is concerned with the 'what' of a language