

**TASK-BASED SYLLABUS DESIGN: ADVANCED ESL  
FOR TOURISM AND CUSTOMER RELATIONS**

by

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## ABSTRACT

An overview of two theoretical areas of specialization in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) is presented: integrating language and content (ILC) and recent trends in syllabus design in language education. ILC is examined through the lens of each of three theoretical influences: Krashen's monitor model, Cummin's language proficiency model and the language socialization perspective. Issues in syllabus design are addressed using Kuhn's (1970) notion of paradigm shift. The conventional paradigm and an emerging paradigm in language education are discussed using Long and Crookes' (1992) typology. A model, task-based syllabus design, which stems from the emerging paradigm provides the basis for the design of a new course at Vancouver Community College--*Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations*. An overview of the content-based thematic units and samples of actual tasks are provided. Finally, the process of designing a syllabus by adapting a task-based model for integrating language and content is reflected upon. Teacher reflection, as case-study research, is a valuable tool for learning about complex issues. Although I was not able to adopt a task-based model quite as task-based theorists envision, I feel it was invaluable to me as a teacher/planner; the model served as a standard for imitation and comparison.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Maureen Claire Sawkins, who as a teacher and colleague, has encouraged me from the beginning of this project. She is an inspiring mentor and a true professional.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE . . . . .	ii
ABSTRACT . . . . .	iii
DEDICATION . . . . .	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	v
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	xi
CHAPTER	
1. LITERATURE REVIEW . . . . .	1
Introduction and Clarification of Terms . . . . .	1
Integrating Language and Content (ILC)--Theoretical Perspectives and Pedagogic Distinctions . . . . .	2
Theoretical Perspectives . . . . .	3
Krashen's Monitor Model . . . . .	4
Cummins' Language Proficiency Model . . . . .	5
Language Socialisation Perspective . . . . .	7
Pedagogic Distinctions . . . . .	8
Theme-based Instruction . . . . .	10
Sheltered Instruction . . . . .	10
Adjunct Instruction . . . . .	11

	<b>Page</b>
Concerns with the Above Models . . . . .	11
Syllabus Design in Language Education . . . . .	13
Paradigm Shift . . . . .	13
Synthetic Approaches . . . . .	14
Formal Syllabus . . . . .	15
Functional Syllabus . . . . .	16
Analytic Approaches . . . . .	19
Process Syllabus . . . . .	20
Procedural Syllabus Design . . . . .	22
Task-based Syllabus Design . . . . .	24
2. A MODEL FOR INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CONTENT	
IN THE CLASSROOM: TASK-BASED SYLLABUS DESIGN . . . . .	25
Introduction and Clarification of Terms . . . . .	25
Long and Crookes' (1992) Six Phases of Syllabus Design . . . . .	26
Needs Analysis . . . . .	27
Syllabus Design . . . . .	29
Methodology Design . . . . .	31
Materials Writing . . . . .	32
Goals . . . . .	32



	<b>Page</b>
Input . . . . .	33
Activities . . . . .	34
Teacher Roles . . . . .	36
Learner Roles . . . . .	37
Settings . . . . .	38
Testing . . . . .	39
Program Evaluation . . . . .	42
Conclusion . . . . .	42
<b>3. DESIGNING THE SYLLABUS . . . . .</b>	<b>44</b>
Introduction . . . . .	44
Background to the Course Design . . . . .	44
Designing the Syllabus . . . . .	49
Organization of the Syllabus . . . . .	51
Thematic Modules . . . . .	52
Integrating Language and Content in the Learning Tasks	53
Design of the Learning Tasks . . . . .	55
Methodology . . . . .	60
Conclusion . . . . .	67

4. A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TASK-BASED

SYLLABUS .....	69
Introduction and Clarification of Terms .....	69
Reflective Analysis .....	70
Needs Analysis .....	71
Syllabus Design .....	73
Methodology Design .....	76
Materials Writing .....	78
Goals .....	79
Input and Activities .....	80
Teacher Roles .....	81
Learner Roles .....	84
Settings .....	85
Testing .....	87
Program Evaluation .....	89
Conclusion .....	90
References .....	92
Appendix A .....	100
Appendix B .....	103
Appendix C .....	108

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
3.1 Characteristics of the Syllabus . . . . .	50
3.2 Organization of Thematic Modules . . . . .	52
3.3 Designing the Learning Tasks . . . . .	59
3.4 Building the Syllabus . . . . .	60
3.5 Gatbonton and Gu's (1994) Communicative Methodology . . . . .	61

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BICS</b>	<b>Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills</b>
<b>CALP</b>	<b>Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency</b>
<b>EFL</b>	<b>English as a Foreign Language</b>
<b>ELA</b>	<b>English Language Assessment (Assessment Centre at VCC)</b>
<b>ELS</b>	<b>English Language Skills (Department at VCC)</b>
<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language</b>
<b>ESP</b>	<b>English for Specific Purposes</b>
<b>EST</b>	<b>English for Science and Technology</b>
<b>EWP</b>	<b>English in the Workplace</b>
<b>IL</b>	<b>Interlanguage</b>
<b>ILC</b>	<b>Integration of Language and Content</b>
<b>LEP</b>	<b>Limited English Proficient</b>
<b>L2</b>	<b>Second Language</b>
<b>SLA</b>	<b>Second Language Acquisition</b>
<b>TBLT</b>	<b>Task-based Language Teaching</b>
<b>TESL</b>	<b>Teaching English as a Second Language</b>
<b>VESL</b>	<b>Vocational English as a Second Language</b>
<b>VCC</b>	<b>Vancouver Community College</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction and Clarification of Terms

This review of literature overviews two areas of theory informing syllabus design: the integration of English language instruction in a content (ILC) area, and the evolution of syllabus design in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL). In addressing these two areas of theory, it is necessary to provide the historical contexts of their development.

A brief clarification of some of the important terms used in this thesis is necessary. The terms *student* and *learner* are used interchangeably. The learners referred to are that diverse group of adults who study ESL, and who, therefore, need support in meeting the communicative demands of classroom work. Because the term ESL is often inaccurate, as English may be the third or fourth language a student is mastering, the term Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is also used. *Teacher* is used to refer to the person whose main role it is to teach. *Teacher/planner* is used to emphasize the course planning activities, such as designing a syllabus or materials that a specific teacher does in addition to classroom teaching.

*Methodology*, *syllabus* and *curriculum* are large and complex concepts, and the terms are used by different writers in different ways. For the purposes

of this paper, I will use traditional definitions, but further discuss implications and inadequacies of those definitions. Methodology, traditionally, deals with pedagogy; the selection, sequencing and presentation of learning activities. Syllabus refers to the selection and grading of content, and curriculum more widely refers to all aspects of planning, implementing, evaluating and managing an educational program.

### **Integrating Language and Content (ILC)--**

#### **Theoretical Perspectives and Pedagogic Distinctions**

Recent studies focus on the relationship between language and content and view language as an instrument that is used to learn content material.

Wesche and Ready (1985) report the results of a study that suggests:

. . . gains in second language proficiency are best achieved in situations where the second language is used as a vehicle for communication about other subjects rather than itself being the object of study. (p. 90)

The integration of language and content (ILC) can be broadly defined as language and content instruction for the educational benefit of LEP students. Language development and content development are not regarded in isolation from one another and there is a focus on the intersection of language, content and thinking objectives.

English for specific purposes (ESP) is the area of English language teaching which focuses on preparing learners "for chosen communicative

environments” (Mohan, 1986, p. 15). It differs from general ESL in that it is based on a close analysis of the learner’s communicative needs for a specific occupation or activity, as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity (Strevens, 1980). The language in an ESP course is not the subject matter, but is being learned as part of the process of acquiring some quite different body of knowledge or set of skills (Robinson, 1980).

According to Phillips (1981, p. 92), the element that gives ESP its identity as a distinctive area of language teaching activity is the *learner’s purpose*. This purpose is not restricted to linguistic competence alone, but involves the mastery of skills in which language forms an integral part. While often addressing the communicative needs of professionals such as physicians or engineers, ESP also addresses the needs of nonprofessional workers and the subcategory Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) is commonly used in North America.

### Theoretical Perspectives

According to Mohan and Dooley (1993, pp. 14-16), it is helpful to consider ILC with respect to three theoretical perspectives: Krashen’s Monitor model, Cummin’s Language Proficiency model, and the Language Socialisation perspective.

### Krashen's Monitor Model

One of the best known and most influential theories of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1970s and early 1980s was Krashen's monitor theory; the *input hypothesis* is the central principle. The claim is that human beings acquire language in one way only, by understanding messages. Krashen (1985) termed this *comprehensible input*. Krashen's work has been widely debated and criticized (for a summary, see: Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, pp. 245-249), but has played an important role in encouraging ESL teachers to move from a grammar-based approach to a more communicative approach. It may also have been influential in encouraging content teachers to make efforts to be more comprehensible by adjusting their speech and by providing contextual support.

Language learning (or acquisition, following the Krashen model) in content-area ESL courses is stimulated by the rich context the subject matter provides, by the inherent interest and relevance of the content, and by the fact that the learners focus on messages and not on language form (Krashen, 1982; Mohan, 1986). Language ceases to be taught in isolation (Mohan, 1986, p. 18).

Krashen's model is a theory of second language acquisition, not a theory of knowledge acquisition. It speaks to the goals of the language class, not to the goals of the content class. As far as the model is concerned, content classes are merely possible sources of comprehensible input. It distinguishes between



language classes that provide more comprehensible input and those that provide less. Krashen's stress on comprehension has been beneficial. On the other hand, as Swain (1988) has pointed out, it has drawn attention away from the importance of productive rather than receptive language performance (i.e. speaking and writing rather than listening and reading).

In Krashen's model, content simply means message, and comprehensible input is language with an understandable message or content. Content does not have the specific meaning that it has for a content area teacher, and integration is a non-issue. While this model appears to address the issue of ILC, it is of debatable use as an instructional model. Krashen's input hypothesis model stresses naturalistic *acquisition* rather than learning in a school setting and the model is untestable.

### **Cummins' Language Proficiency Model**

Cummins (1984) looks at the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement. He questions the assumption that "the 'language proficiency' required for L2 (second language) face-to-face communication is no different from that required for performance on an L2 cognitive/academic task" (Cummins, 1984, p. 131). He delineated two levels of communication: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP), and then created a theoretical framework that added the

dimensions of context and cognition. Communicative tasks may be either more context-embedded or more context-reduced; and communicative tasks may be either more cognitively undemanding or more cognitively demanding.

Cummins emphasized the need to distinguish between BICS and CALP so that ESL student evaluations on language proficiency tests would not discolour their true academic potential. Bilingual proficiency means that the development of proficiency in one language can contribute to the development of the other; there is a Common Underlying Proficiency. This interdependence of development is most characteristic of context-reduced, cognitively demanding language proficiency, of which literacy skills are a central case, although oral discourse can be context-reduced and cognitively demanding.

With respect to ILC, Cummins' model has played a very important role by drawing attention to the differences between basic conversational language and academic language proficiency, which takes years to acquire. It underlines the importance of recognising and respecting the resources of both the learner's languages, and the opportunities for positive transfer between them, especially in literacy. Because it considers both first and second language development, it implies that there is a need to go beyond a second language perspective and to incorporate first language development research.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, pp. 169-170) summarize the argument that tests in schools do not truly measure language proficiency, the central element of Cummins' model, so what Cummins is really referring to is test-wiseness. In addition, literacy skills and references are specific to particular cultures and communities so that the notion of a Common Underlying Proficiency is problematic. Also problematic is the notion of context-dependence. Mohan and Dooley (1993) state that the debate surrounding his work raises important questions: Can we identify academic language proficiency? Can we identify cognitive/linguistic elements which are cross-cultural? Can we clarify the concepts of context and context dependence?

### **Language Socialisation Perspective**

The language socialisation perspective is not a model devised by one individual, but a set of related ideas shared to some degree among a diverse group of scholars. While Krashen's and Cummins' models derive from a tradition in social science which looks for causal explanation, this perspective derives from the very different "interpretive" or "environmentalist" approach which explores how people assign meaning to their social world (Mohan & Dooley, 1993, p. 15).

Language socialisation means both socialisation through language and socialisation to use language. The notion of language socialisation draws on

sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches to the study of linguistic competence. Social and psychological factors (e.g. communicative need, social interaction patterns, motivation for formal language study, or preferred learning style, etc.) are analysed to determine their predicted influence on SLA. Language socialisation aims at understanding how individuals become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, pp. 251-266; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), ILC with LEP students is a special case of language socialisation, since we need to study how LEP students learn language and subject matter at the same time.

### **Pedagogic Distinctions**

Content-based ESL and ESP share several of the same guiding principles, for example: the importance of context, the importance of attending primarily to language meaning not form, and consideration for the needs of the learner (Mohan, 1986). Likewise, content-based ESL and ESP use many of the same instructional techniques based on communication and meaning. However, in some ways the two types of instruction are quite different, the most important differences stemming from their respective objectives.

Content-based ESL aims to teach content, in addition to teaching particular language skills required for understanding the content, and to improve overall English proficiency. Language learning is achieved primarily through

the careful presentation of understandable material. Content material is carefully organized to support language learning, as recommended by Mohan (1986), and the organisation considers both content and language. The classes are taught by teachers who make linguistic and cultural adjustments in order to help their students understand (Krashen, 1982, p. 167). For successful language learning in content-area classes, it is necessary that students comprehend the material and the teacher's messages (either through prior knowledge or strong contextual clues), and that teachers can understand the students' messages well enough to provide feedback (Mohan, 1986).

ESP, on the other hand, has the narrower objective of preparing learners to function in very specific environments. For example, a six-week pre-departure course for a group of Chinese graduate students who will work as teaching assistants at Canadian universities, or a three month language upgrading program for foreign-trained immigrant nurses. Thus, ESP courses are structured principally to promote efficient and effective acquisition of particular language and communicative skills.

Content-based ESL and ESP also share the assumption that language is learned most effectively using content of interest and relevance to the learner. Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989, pp. 14-25) outline three different program models used at the college and university level: theme-based, sheltered, and

adjunct. Each model illustrates alternatives for integrating the language curriculum with the academic or occupational interests of students and is classified according to the relative focus on language or content.

### **Theme-based Instruction**

In theme-based instruction, a language syllabus is developed around selected topics usually drawn from a larger content area. The organisational principles inherent in the theme or topic suggest an array of language items or activities, ensuring their contextualisation and significance (Brinton et al., 1989, p. 15). Theme-based language courses are the most widespread of the three content-based models, possibly because they can be readily adapted to existing institutional curricula and settings, and topics can be selected to match student interests.

### **Sheltered Instruction**

In sheltered instruction, a regular content syllabus is adapted to accommodate the students' limited English proficiency. Course texts and materials may or may not be adapted for LEP students, because the primary goal is content learning. Content courses are taught in English to a segregated group of learners by a content area specialist. The teacher is responsible for both content and language.

### **Adjunct Instruction**

In adjunct instruction, a special ESL course is linked with a content course in which both second language learners and native English speakers may be enrolled. The content teacher is responsible for content and the ESL teacher teaches language. Although there is an attempt to bridge the gap between content and language learning, the specific goal for the adjunct class is language support. There is not an explicit system of integration, but rather an assumption that academic coping strategies and cognitive skills will transfer from one course to the other.

### **Concerns with the Above Models**

Theme-based, sheltered and adjunct models of instruction share several features with each other and with ESP. Firstly, content is the organizing principle of the syllabus. Secondly, these instructional models rely on the use of *authentic* materials. Authentic materials are those that were not originally designed for the purpose of language instruction (ie. newspapers, employee handbooks, videos, etc.). Thirdly, in all the instructional models some degree of accommodation to the needs of the language learner occurs.

Each model clearly shows problematic issues with ILC, albeit for different reasons. Using a theme-based instructional model, all four traditional language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are integrated in the

content area. In the Sheltered model, content is the focus, but study skills may be integrated. With the adjunct model, language and content are not truly integrated. All of these instructional models, to one degree or another, also raise the issue of collaboration between the language teacher and the content teacher. Whether ESL teachers work with content teachers in support roles or as true collaborating partners are issues of knowledge exchange, power, authority and commitment.

Viewing innovation in the school, Canadian Sociologist Michael Fullan (1991, pp. 135-136) cites research which questions the value of collaboration as an end in itself; he states “we must be careful not to assume that increasing interaction among teachers is automatically a good thing.” Collaboration between instructors with similar philosophical orientations about language and the conceptual development of their students will facilitate the relationship. Only teachers’ collective vision of the potential of the collaborative classroom for exciting cognitive and linguistic achievement will promote both effective instruction for students and collaboration between colleagues in a climate of mutual growth, respect, and support (Fullan, 1991, p. 135).

Addressing issues of ILC, Mohan (1993) calls for a closer inspection of classroom processes; he suggests that two research bases for the systematic analysis of content course activities are knowledge structures and tasks. He



posits that each of these is a unit of analysis common to both the content view and the language view, which allows these two views to be coordinated.

### **Syllabus Design in Language Education**

Syllabus designers--whether teachers, planners or course administrators--do not design syllabuses in neutral or objective ways. Every syllabus is a representation of knowledge and capabilities which has been shaped by the designer's views concerning the nature of language, how the language may be most appropriately taught or presented to learners, and how the language may be productively worked upon during learning (Breen, 1987, p. 83).

### **Paradigm Shift**

In his classic interpretation of scientific change, Thomas Kuhn (1970) proposed the notion of a 'paradigm' as that frame of reference which a community of specialists will share at a particular moment in history. For Kuhn (1970, pp. 182-210), a paradigm is the theory, research and practice of a community of specialists which reveals shared and consistent assumptions, beliefs, values and ways of interpreting experience. Ideas in methodology, evaluation, research and syllabus design are particular expressions of a paradigm we share at a particular moment in history.

Any syllabus is therefore the meeting point of a perspective upon language itself, upon using language, and upon teaching and learning which is a contemporary and commonly accepted interpretation of the

harmonious links between theory, research, and classroom practice.  
(Breen, 1987, p. 83)

For Kuhn, a revolution in science is a period of time when one paradigm is replaced by another. The intervening phase is, for the community of specialists, a confusing period of 'paradigm shift.' Eventually, the new paradigm will either be assimilated into the prevailing one, or the new paradigm will gain momentum and develop so that it replaces its predecessor. Breen (1987) and other language educators (Brown, 1975; Raimes, 1983; Richards & Rogers, 1986; Stern, 1983) have applied Kuhn's notions of a paradigm shift to evaluate current changes in different aspects of language education.

One result of a shifting paradigm is the way syllabus designers view their work; Long and Crookes (1992) suggest we view syllabus design from two different world views: a *synthetic*, Type A approach or an *analytic* Type B approach (Long & Crookes, 1992; Wilkins, 1976; Yalden, 1983).

### **Synthetic Approaches**

Formal and functional syllabuses are examples of synthetic, type A approaches. These two syllabus types express the currently dominant paradigm in language education by outlining plans of language knowledge and what is to be achieved through teaching and learning as formal statements. Synthetic syllabuses may use a variety of units, including word, structure, notion, function, topic or situation as the unit of organisation. Long and Crookes

(1992, p. 28) state that *synthetic* refers to the learner's role; to learn a language in parts which are independent of one another, and also to integrate, or synthesize, the parts to use them for communicative purposes.

### **Formal Syllabus**

The Formal syllabus, also referred to as the structural or grammatical syllabus, is the most common and well-tried type of syllabus in language teaching. It focuses on the systematic and rule-based nature of language itself. The Formal syllabus gives priority to how the text of language is realised and organised in speech and writing. The roots of this syllabus type are in the description and analysis of language by academic linguists. The learners' role within the Formal syllabus plan is to learn how to be correct or accurate in his or her production of the new language.

A Formal syllabus will most often separately identify pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and morphology, and the structural features of discourse. Given the view within the conventional paradigm of language as hierarchical, the syllabus designer subdivides what is to be learned from larger units into smaller units. In this way, the criteria for selection and subdivision of a Formal syllabus approximate very closely to the analysis of language undertaken by the linguist. A Formal syllabus will be sequenced primarily from simple to

complex but in ways which may also recognize frequency of usage to less frequent usage, or form most useful structures, vocabulary, etc. to less useful.

According to Breen (1987, p. 86), there are four main arguments supporting Formal syllabus design in language teaching. Firstly, that it is well established and it is informed by a long tradition of linguistic analysis. Secondly, that it presents learners with a subject-matter which is systematic and rule-governed. These analytical categories or schemes may make it easier for the learner to uncover how the language works. Thirdly, that because the language has already been analysed in this way by descriptive linguists and 'language' is seen as subject-matter, it facilitates planning by syllabus designers. Fourthly, Breen (1987, p. 87) argues that this type of syllabus relies on a particular view of human learning; one in which a learner has the capacity to be metalinguistic. That is, the learner has the capacity for categorising experience, for seeking regularities in that experience, and for looking beneath the surface of things to discover how they work in order to learn the language more easily.

### **Functional Syllabus**

The Functional syllabus redefines language knowledge by focusing on the purposes a learner may achieve through language in particular social activities or events. The Functional syllabus is a synthetic plan of categories of language use; most commonly an analysis of interpersonal or social functions.

A learner works within a Functional syllabus in order to learn how to achieve certain purposes with the language.

Since the mid-1970s, the functional syllabus has probably been the alternative to Formal syllabus types which has received the most attention, particularly in the areas of implementation and materials development. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new branch of linguistics emerged which represented a strong interest in the study of language, not merely as a phenomenon somehow separable from its use in everyday life, but as an entity playing a central role in social events and social structure. Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics are concerned with the analysis of language in use and with the relationships between the language code or textual system (written or spoken) and how people behave with language in social groups in certain social situations.

The sociolinguist Del Hymes (1971, 1972) argued for the now influential concept of *communicative competence*. His argument had important significance for language education because communicative competence entails an interdependent knowledge of the rules of the language, the knowledge of the conventions of its use which are established and developed within social and cultural groups, and a concern with language meaning.

In addition to the sociolinguistic roots of the communicative approach to language teaching, there was motivation to improve existing methodology. Breen (1987) reports that, “this period in language teaching has also been characterised by a disillusionment with the seemingly ‘mechanistic’ methodology associated with grammar-translation and audio-lingualism.”

The Functional syllabus shares with the Formal syllabus a skill-oriented view of learner capabilities. Therefore, proficiency is identified with the accurate and appropriate use of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and the process of developing a repertoire of functions is similarly identified with a sequential development from receptive to productive skills. Unlike the Formal syllabus, the Functional syllabus does not select and subdivide language on the basis of an inherent system or rules of language. The Functional syllabus categorises types of language purposes, perhaps based upon student needs, into sets and sub-sets. It is assumed that the learner acquires certain key functions (i.e. those most needed) as a kind of foundation of language use and then gradually builds on this foundation (i.e. to those less needed). Both Formal and Functional syllabus types rely on descriptive linguistics and a faith that their respective organisations of language is accessible to language learners at the time that it is introduced.

There seem to be two main arguments supporting Functional syllabus design in language teaching. Firstly, the felt need within the profession to improve upon old methodology coincided with developments in sociolinguistics which reoriented language educators' views to the purposes for which language can be used. Secondly, the recognition of the importance of meaning (Stern, 1983, p. 132) and the wish to enable learners to use language, from virtually the outset of their learning, to achieve things in an interpersonal or social way. This view implies that fluency may be valued more than linguistic accuracy or knowledge which is a significant reorientation from the Formal syllabus.

### Analytic Approaches

The alternative to synthetic approaches are analytic approaches. These represent recently developed views on the nature of language and its use and on the learning and teaching of language. Synthetic syllabuses focus on *what* is to be learned, and analytic syllabuses focus on *how* the language is to be learned (Long & Crookes, 1992, p. 29). Analytic refers to the learners' role; to analyse how language is used and how it is to be learned. Breen (1987) outlines two types of syllabuses which exemplify analytic approaches: the process syllabus and the task-based syllabus. Long and Crookes (1992) subdivide analytic approaches into three syllabus types: the process syllabus, the procedural syllabus, and the task-based syllabus. Analytic approaches express an emergent

paradigm in the language teaching community which challenges established models for syllabus design and, as such, there are fewer implemented programs.

### Process Syllabus

Twenty-five years ago, Postman and Weingartner (1969) challenged an assumption which they saw as prevalent in the practise of contemporary education.

The invention of a dichotomy between content and method is both naive and dangerous . . . the critical content of any learning experience is the method or process through which the learning occurs . . . It is not what you say to people that counts; it is what you have them *do*. (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 30)

These writers were participating in a debate which has a long heritage in educational thought and practice (Dewey, 1916; Friere, 1970; Holt, 1976; Parker & Rubin, 1966; Peters, 1959; Stenhouse, 1975). The assumption that the content of lessons is what is learned is challenged by the view that the teaching-learning process is the significant substance of lessons. This view implies that any syllabus is not merely subordinated to methodology, but is actually replaced by what is learned from the experience of classroom work.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that the appropriateness or even the possibility of designing a syllabus to represent communicative knowledge is seriously in doubt (Widdowson, 1984a, 1987). A syllabus only has an indirect influence upon actual language learning. The syllabus is mediated by teaching



and the classroom context within which teaching is only one element. It is further mediated by learners' participation in the classroom work and by their own interpretation of appropriate objectives and content for language learning.

Allwright (1984) is convinced that learners don't learn what teachers teach. That learners learn less than what is taught and things other than the teacher intended is the crucial intervening variable of learner participation. For Allwright, it is not the content of a lesson that is the basis for learning but the process of classroom interaction which generates opportunities for learning. These opportunities may be acted upon in a way that different learners learn different things from the same lesson.

A learner consciously or unconsciously superimposes his or her own plan of content upon the teacher's syllabus. Learners also superimpose their own learning strategies and preferred ways of working upon classroom methodology. The variables which intervene between the planning of a syllabus and the actual learning are so complex that the nature of the original plan might be virtually unidentifiable. Candlin (1984) suggests that what a syllabus consists of can only be discerned after a course is over, by observing not what was planned, but what took place.

According to Breen (1987, p. 160), process plans are derived from an analysis of performance within events and situations, but also map out the

procedural knowledge or the underlying operations which enable a language user to communicate within a range of these. Process plans are oriented to classroom procedures and a philosophical process-oriented approach to learning. Breen and Candlin's (1980) focus is the learner and learning processes and preferences, not the language or language learning processes. They argue that any syllabus, preset or not, is constantly subject to negotiation and reinterpretation by teachers and learners in the classroom. Both Breen (1987) and Candlin (1984) claim that learning should be and can only be the product of negotiation.

One reaction to this dilemma within language teaching in recent years has been to directly explore these relationships within the syllabus. In a sense, the Process syllabus addresses three interdependent processes: communication, learning, and the group process of a classroom community.

### **Procedural Syllabus Design**

The procedural syllabus is associated with the work of Prabhu (1980, 1984, 1987) in India on the Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project. Prabhu (1987) recognises Krashen's claim that language form is acquired subconsciously but denies the sufficiency of Krashen's comprehensible input. Prabhu supports the idea that students need plenty of opportunity to develop their comprehension abilities before any production is demanded of

them. He suggests that language acquisition occurs when the learner's attention is focused on meaning through task-completion, not on language form.

Prabhu's definition of task for the purposes of the Bangalore project was oriented towards cognition, process and teacher fronted pedagogy:

An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task'. (Prabhu, 1987, p. 24)

In practice, two related tasks or two versions of the same task were paired. The 'pre-task' was used by the teacher in a whole-class format, perhaps with one or more students participating. The purpose was to present and demonstrate the task, to assess its difficulty for the class, to modify it accordingly and to elicit relevant language. The main task was then worked on by the students and teacher provided feedback upon task completion.

Prabhu (1987) outlines that tasks should be intellectually challenging enough to maintain student interest, for that will sustain learners' efforts at task completion, focus them on meaning and engage them in the task's linguistic demands. The examples of tasks Prabhu provides are familiar to communicative language teaching. They include information gaps, calculating distances and planning itineraries using maps and charts, assessing applicants for a job, completing "whodunit" stories and answering comprehension questions about dialogues. Although these tasks may be useful for language

learning, they are activities which students may never need to do in English outside the classroom.

The activities in a procedural syllabus are preset *pedagogic tasks*, not related to a set of *target tasks* determined by an analysis of a particular group of learners' future needs. (Long & Crookes, 1992, p. 36)

Three main innovations in methodology emerged from procedural syllabus design: the pedagogic focus on task completion instead of on language used in the process; the lack of preselected language input; and the absence of overt feedback on error.

### **Task-based Syllabus Design**

According to Breen (1987, p. 161), Task-based syllabus design explicitly crosses the theoretical divide between content and methodology in three ways: (i) its representation of communicative competence as the undertaking and achievement of a range of tasks; (ii) its reliance on the contributions of learners in terms of the prior communicative competence which learners bring to any task; and (iii) its emphasis upon the learning process as appropriate content during language learning. A detailed description of task-based syllabus design is outlined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A MODEL FOR INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CONTENT IN THE CLASSROOM: TASK-BASED SYLLABUS DESIGN

#### Introduction and Clarification of Terms

There are many definitions of task as determined by different authors.

Long (1985) defines task using its everyday, nontechnical meaning:

a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination and helping someone across a road. In other words, by 'task' is meant the hundred and one things people *do* in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. Tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists. (p. 89)

Crookes (1986) narrows the definition of task in terms of what the learner will do in the classroom (a *learning* task) rather than in the outside world:

A piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work. (p. 1)

The definition that is most relevant for this paper is from Nunan (1989) who considers:

the communicative task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than on form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. (p. 10)

The terms *task*, *learning task*, and *communicative task*, are used interchangeably in this paper. Three features of learning tasks stand out. The first is that tasks are oriented toward *goals*. Students are expected to arrive at an outcome. Thus, learners carry out a task with a sense of what they need to accomplish through their talk or action. The second feature of task is work or *activity*. This suggests that students take an active role in carrying out a task, whether working alone or with others. The third feature is that learning tasks engage the same abilities which underlie communication itself. Therefore, interpreting and expressing how communication works and the process of negotiating about such things (communicating in order to learn) are important elements of learning tasks. The task-based syllabus represents the claim that both the participation in communication and communicating for learning are equally valuable and, indeed, necessary activities when a person is learning a new language.

### **Long and Crookes' (1992) Six Phases of Syllabus Design**

Long and Crookes (1992, pp. 43-45) claim that course design requires theoretically coherent and empirically grounded choices in six distinct areas:

1. Needs Analysis
2. Syllabus Design
3. Methodology Design
4. Materials Writing
5. Testing
6. Program Evaluation

They further add that the first and key decision is choice of a “unit of analysis” because it reflects the designer’s theory, and it influences decisions in all other areas. For example, they advocate using task as a unit; they argue that this implies using a task-based syllabus, a problem-solving approach, small group methodology and precludes structural grading.

### Needs Analysis

The needs established for a particular group of students are the outcome of a needs analysis. These needs are influenced by the ideological preconceptions of the analyst(s). In a teaching situation where the teacher/planner favours a task-based approach, the needs analysis focuses on tasks that the student will need to do either in their work place or in a specialist academic field. A different group of analysts working with the same group of students, but with different views on teaching and learning, would be highly likely to produce a different set of needs. Robinson (1991, p. 11) concurs that

the type of information sought through a needs analysis is usually closely related to the approach to teaching and learning and to the eventual syllabus design. For example, if the teacher/planner favours a pedagogic approach which focuses on linguistic forms and their accurate reproduction, then the needs analysis is likely to involve some study of the students' grasp of linguistic forms and linguistic analysis of target level texts. Students' needs will be expressed in terms of language items which must then be taught.

Task-based syllabuses require a needs analysis to be conducted in terms of target *tasks* that learners are preparing to undertake, such as: buying a movie ticket, renting an apartment, reading a technical manual, plotting information onto a graph, making a hotel reservation, and so forth. The students may be required to perform the tasks, thus revealing which they are already capable of performing and where their deficiencies lie. Valuable expertise in conducting such needs analyses was accumulated by English for special purposes (ESP) specialists in the 1970s and 1980s (Berwick, 1988; Jupp & Hodlin, 1975; Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1978; Widdowson, 1981; Wilkins, 1976; Yalden, 1987). Much of this work can still be drawn upon, even though most early ESP program designers were working within a notional-functional framework and in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.



There are different meanings or types of *needs*. First, *needs* can refer to students' study or job requirements; that is, what they have to be able to do at the end of their language course. This is a *product-oriented*, or goal-oriented definition of needs (Widdowson, 1981, p. 2). Needs in this sense are perhaps more appropriately described as "objectives." Second, we can consider "what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language. This is a *process-oriented* definition of needs and relates to transitional behaviour, the means of learning" (Widdowson, 1981, p. 2). Third, we can consider what the students themselves would like to gain from the language course. This view of needs implies that students may have personal aims in addition to (or even in opposition to) the requirements of their studies or jobs. Personal needs may be devalued by both teachers and learners as wants or desires. Fourth, *needs* can be what the user-institution or society at large regards as necessary or desirable to be learnt from a program of language instruction. Finally, Robinson (1991, p. 8) suggests that we may interpret *needs* as *lacks*; that is, what the students do not know or cannot do in English.

### **Syllabus Design**

Once target tasks have been identified via the needs analysis, the next step is to classify and organize them. For example, in a course for trainee flight attendants, the serving of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks and refreshments

might be classified as serving food and beverages. Learning tasks which engage the students in various aspects of communication are then developed and sequenced to form the *task-based syllabus*. Simplicity and complexity will not result from the traditional application of linguistic criteria, but reside in some aspects of the tasks themselves. A few of the potential sequencing criteria that have been proposed are: the number of steps involved, the number of solutions to a problem, the amount and kind of language required, the number of learners involved, and other aspects of intellectual challenge a learning task poses. (See further discussions in: Long & Crookes, 1992; Pica, Kanagy & Falodun, in press.)

The theme-based organisation of content as the focus of learning tasks is a newer orientation to syllabus design than the earlier functionalist orientation of ESP. Within English for specific purposes, there is now strong concern with the development of tasks which are appropriate to the learning and target needs of specific groups - such as students in diverse academic disciplines and learners of particular technical and vocational areas of knowledge and skill. Task-based work in ESP emerges from the practicalities of planning valid classroom work for students who are learning a language, not for its own sake, but as the means for the achievement of communication within a particular work or study related context.

### Methodology Design

The traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology suggests that syllabus design deals with the selection and grading of content (the *what* of teaching), and methodology deals with the selection and sequencing of learning activities (the *how* of teaching). According to the traditional distinction then, task design would seem to belong to the realm of methodology. However, with the development of communicative language teaching the distinction between syllabus design and methodology has blurred. The teacher/planner needs to specify both the content (or ends of learning) and the tasks (or means to those ends) and also to integrate them. Concurrent consideration is given to content, methodology and evaluation. This suggests a much broader perspective on curriculum than the traditional distinction. Task based theorists de-emphasize the need to articulate methodological concerns and suggest that they are inherent in the tasks.

The negotiation of *learning process* urged by many (Breen, 1987; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) can be built into task-based language teaching as a methodological consideration. Breen (1987) draws attention to the frequent disparity between what the teacher intends as the outcome of a task and what the learners actually derive from it. According to Nunan (1989, p. 20) learning outcomes will be influenced by

learners' perceptions about what they should contribute, their views about the nature and demands of the task, and their definitions of the situation in which the task takes place. In addition, we cannot know for certain how different learners are likely to carry out a task. Nunan (1989, p. 20) suggests that one way of dealing with the discrepancy between psychological/operational realities for the learner and the teacher is to involve learners in designing or selecting tasks. He suggests that it should be possible to allow learners choices in deciding what to do and how to do it provided there is a major change in our view of the roles we assign to learners and teachers.

### **Materials Writing**

Because they are primarily researchers and theorists, Long and Crookes (1992) and Breen (1987) have little to say regarding the writing of materials; Nunan (1989) and Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (in press) offer suggestions for task-based materials design for teachers. Nunan (1989, p. 11) offers a framework for analysing communicative tasks which has three main components: goals, input and activities; which in turn implies certain teacher roles, learner roles and settings.

### **Goals**

Learning goals provide the point of contact between the task and the broader syllabus. According to Nunan (1989, p. 49), goals are the vague

general intentions behind any given learning task and may relate to a range of general outcomes (communicative, affective or cognitive) or may directly describe teacher or learner behaviour. He also notes that goals are not always stated but may be inferred from an examination of a task. In some cases, a complex task involving a range of activities might simultaneously have several goals. Nunan also distinguishes between goals aimed at teaching general English and those developing skill in ESP. He gives the example that modules for developing listening skills can be divided into those focusing on general listening (i.e. understanding spoken media) and those for specialised listening (i.e. understanding university lectures).

### **Input**

Input for Nunan (1989, pp. 53-59) refers to the data that form the task. He advocates the use of authentic materials to form the basis for communicative tasks, but raises questions about 'authenticity' and what mixture of authentic and published course materials is valid. For language courses with goals relating to the development of academic skills, or preparing learners for further study, it has been suggested (Widdowson, 1978) that texts can be taken from content areas and activities adapted from relevant academic disciplines. Learners will be introduced to the discourse and arguments of those particular disciplines. For VESL and English in the workplace (EWP) courses Belfiore

and Burnaby (1984, pp. 84-85) suggest gathering authentic materials from the worksite. For example, photographs of each step in the production process at a factory could be used to have learners write instructions regarding production and clarify any area of misunderstanding.

### **Activities**

Activities specify what learners will actually do with the input which forms the learning tasks. Nunan (1989, p. 60) points out that the issue of authenticity is also relevant to the activities the learners are required to do. It is limiting the possibilities for language learning to use authentic materials in non-authentic ways.

In generating a typology of task types, Pica et al. (in press) outlined four conditions which must be present in order to promote the greatest opportunities for language learners in terms of comprehension of input, feedback on production, and interlanguage (IL) modification. The following conditions must be present to ensure those processes:

1. Each learner holds some information which must be exchanged and manipulated;
2. Learners are required to request and supply this information to each other;
3. Learners have the same or convergent goals;

4. Only one acceptable outcome is possible from the students' attempt to meet this goal.

These four conditions are desirable because students must work to understand and be understood by each other and there are opportunities for negotiation and activation of language learning strategies.

Studies of interlanguage (IL) (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, pp. 81-83) show that learners pass through fixed developmental sequences which include quite lengthy stages of *nontargetlike* use of language forms as well as use of *nontargetlike* forms. There is no more support for the idea that learners acquire one notion or function at a time, than for the idea they master one word or structure at a time. Progress is often not even unidirectional; there is often evidence of "backsliding" or "deterioration" in learner performance.

In their analysis of task type features, Pica et al. (in press) consider the **jigsaw** task type, where each student has a piece of the information needed to complete the task, as the most likely to generate opportunities for comprehension, feedback and interlanguage (IL) modification processes. They suggest that **information-gap** tasks, where only one student holds crucial, task-relevant information and the other must request it, can only satisfy conditions for successful SLA if students' alternate roles as requesters and suppliers of information. Other tasks, such as **problem solving**, **decision-making** and

**opinion-exchange**, are deemed less likely to generate SLA because learners start out with shared access to all or some of the same information necessary for task completion, and students can reach one of many possible outcomes.

### **Teacher Roles**

The role of the ESP teacher is less clear than the role a general ESL instructor assumes. There is no single, ideal role description. Primarily, the ESP teacher is a *teacher*; the qualities of good teaching generally, and of language teaching specifically, are required for ESP. Some of the basic teaching activities are: shaping the input, encouraging the learner's intention to learn, managing the learning strategies and promoting language practice and use. In addition, the ESP teacher has a variety of roles not normally required of the general ESL teacher. Often, the ESP teacher is involved in designing, setting up and administering of the course. An ESP (or EWP) teacher/planner may conduct the initial needs analysis, which may require considerable diplomacy in order to gain information, access to the students' work environment or authentic documents. It is therefore necessary to develop effective methods of communicating the nature and purpose of the program to non-specialists. Having designed the course, the ESP teacher is then likely to be involved in preparing materials, and quite often devising tests as well as administering them.



## Learner Roles

All learning tasks contain roles for teachers and learners, and conflict is likely to occur if there is any misunderstanding between teachers and learners about their respective roles (Nunan, 1991, p. 289). According to Porter (1986), learners talk more with other learners than with native-speaking partners, and learners do not learn each other's errors. Gass and Varonis (1985) found that there were advantages, when conducting group work, to pairing learners of different proficiency levels as well as from different language backgrounds.

The sequencing of the task-based syllabus relates to two things; the nature of a task and the emerging learning problems of students which are uncovered during participation in the communication task. There is a sequence of refinement in learner competence because tasks require more and more learner competence, and there is a continual sequence of diagnosis and remediation. The emphasis on needs analysis in task-based syllabus design ensures learner-centredness. Initial tasks are diagnostic in two senses. First, they are aimed at uncovering the language competence the learner has. Second, they are diagnostic of what the learner does not yet know or cannot yet do, which becomes the starting point of the ongoing sequence of learning tasks. This development from the learner's initial competence, is linear in progress

towards increased competence and expansive to participate in a widening range of task types.

Breen (1987) elaborates:

The task-based syllabus is two syllabuses side by side; a syllabus of communication tasks and a syllabus of learning-for-communication tasks which serve to facilitate a learner's participation in the former. (p. 161)

The task-based syllabus also focuses upon the learner's own experience and awareness of language learning.

Although it may be dangerous to make assumptions about learners' levels of awareness about language learning, and diagnoses can sometimes be misleading, the learner's level of language awareness is important to determine for instructional purposes. Learners need to be informed about the language itself, about language learning techniques and processes, and about themselves as language learners. The more advanced learners are in terms of language level and learning awareness, the less learner training they are likely to need; in this case it is important to negotiate and be selective.

### **Settings**

The classroom setting refers to the learner configuration (either teacher-fronted, small group, pair or individual), as well as the environment (whether the task takes place in the classroom or outside the classroom). An early task study (Long, Adams & Castanos, 1976) found that small-group tasks prompt

students to use a greater range of language functions than teacher-fronted tasks. In relation to environment, Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985) found that supplementing classroom tasks with community-based experiences resulted in significantly increased language gains. In high schools in the United States, Shirley Brice Heath (1992) found that language learning is enhanced when students are actively involved in selecting the content, learning tasks and evaluation and when that learning is activated beyond the classroom.

### **Testing**

Robinson (1991, p. 73) reports that testing in ESP is a relatively neglected area. The challenge derives from the fact that the student has a definite target related to adequate performance in a study or work situation. Both at the start and at the end of an ESP course we need to know how near a student is to achieving adequate performance. What type of test can measure this?

Language tests can be either norm-reference or criterion-referenced. A norm-referenced test score provides information about an individual's relative rank with reference to other individuals who have taken the test. For criterion-referenced tests, on the other hand, test scores are reported and interpreted with reference to specific content domains or criteria of performance. Tests for

general purpose English are typically norm-referenced, whereas Long and Crookes (1992) state that:

Task-based syllabuses would ideally imply assessment of student learning by way of task-based criterion-referenced tests, whose focus is whether or not students can perform some task to criterion, as established by experts in the field, not their ability to complete discrete-point grammar items . . . developments in criterion-referenced language testing in the past 15 years hold great promise for language teaching in general and for task-based language teaching in particular. (p. 45)

The teacher/planner must determine the exact nature of the criteria for judging adequate performance. This may require the assistance of experts in the specific work or study area that students are or will be involved in. Criterion-referenced testing may have an implicit beneficial effect on teaching; teaching for the test (which some view as inevitable) becomes teaching towards the proper goals of the course.

Theoretically, the test would consist of performance in a real-life situation; although more common is simulated real-life performance. For example, writing an essay using material from several authentic texts in a source booklet. The English Language Assessment (ELA) test used at the King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College (VCC) consists of sub-tests or tasks which replicate what students might be expected to have to do in their subsequent courses of study. All four language skills are tested.

A key question for ESP teacher/planners is how close the subject matter of a test should be to the students' specialist discipline. Students are likely to demand that it be very close, in which case the test designer may wonder whether content knowledge may then compensate for linguistic deficiency. If background knowledge has an effect on text comprehension and test performance, students who have studied English within a specific content area may feel at a comparative disadvantage when taking a supposedly neutral test. How can we assess background knowledge?

In general, Robinson (1991, p. 74) reports support for performance-based teaching when the primary aim is to reinforce teaching and learning, but less support when performance testing is used for selection purposes, specifically when recommending students for future courses of study. The predictive value of performance testing is based on the presupposition that a correlation exists between linguistic proficiency and academic success.

Tests are also part of the broader process of evaluation, which in itself contributes to the teaching and learning process. Test results can help teachers, syllabus designers and writers of course materials to change and develop both themselves and their materials.

### **Program Evaluation**

According to Robinson (1991, p. 65), evaluation of ESP courses has been neglected. ESP courses are often written up in journals as successful, despite there being no account of any objective measurement of this success. Robinson (1991, pp. 65-69) describes a basic distinction between *formative* and *summative* evaluation. Formative evaluation is carried out during the life of a course and the results can be used by the teacher to modify what is being done. Summative evaluation is carried out when the course is finished for the purposes of ascertaining the effectiveness of the course in preparing students for their subsequent work or study experience, as a resource for others thinking of running similar courses or for course cost-effectiveness.

There is some overlap between evaluation and needs analysis. Information on needs is certainly needed for the evaluation. Needs analysis is an ongoing process; students' needs change as a course progresses. Both formative and summative evaluation can be undertaken to provide data as input to possible change. Thus, evaluation can be used as quality control; however, evaluation does not necessarily lead to change.

### **Conclusion**

The major assumption of task-based syllabus design is that learning tasks call upon and engage the same abilities which underlie communication itself.

Therefore, interpreting and expressing how communication works in the target language and the process of negotiating about such things (communicating in order to learn) are important elements. The task-based syllabus represents the claim that both the participation in communication and communicating for learning are equally valuable and, indeed, necessary activities when a person is learning a new language.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DESIGNING THE SYLLABUS**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Three describes the adaptation of a task-based model for designing and teaching a content-based ESL course. In Chapter Four, both the implementation process and the task-based model itself are analysed and critiqued. This is a false separation; it is difficult to describe the designing and teaching of a course without simultaneously analysing and critiquing it, as these processes are interrelated. Designing and teaching a course requires a constant evaluating and revising of what is happening in the classroom on a daily basis, rather than a formal critique of what has happened after completion.

#### **Background to the Course Design**

Chapter Two described task-based curriculum design from the perspective of the curriculum theorists. Such people usually work at a more abstract level than those actually responsible for developing courses and teaching materials, or for the day-to-day task of teaching. Regular classroom teachers are generally presented with curriculum guidelines or sets of syllabus specifications, and are required to develop their courses and programs from these.



Although most teachers at VCC work in relative isolation from each other and professional growth is usually an individual matter, there have been increased opportunities for support from colleagues on this project. Two new VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language) courses in addition to *Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations* were being developed at approximately the same time: *Advanced ESL for Business and Office* and *Advanced ESL for Health Care*. The offices of the two other teachers and my own were located within close proximity of each other and we shared physical resources (student texts, teacher resource books, videos, etc.) as well as insights and ideas. The informal, *ad hoc* style of our communication generated ideas. This support from colleagues was crucial and our orientations towards teaching and course design were similar.

As the teacher/planner developing the syllabus for *Advanced ESL/Tourism and Customer Relations*, I was required to use one main resource as a linguistic basis for the course--Vancouver Community College's *English as a Second Language (ESL) Instructor's Guide: Advanced Level* (1990). The guide, referred to by VCC instructors as the ELS Advanced Level Curriculum Guide, is divided into five sections: Listening skills, Communicative skills, Reading skills, Writing skills and Grammar. Each section, with the exception

of the Grammar section, is composed of four parts: Notes to the Instructor, Goals and Objectives, Teaching Suggestions and Resources.

The Goals and Objectives part lists the goals, enabling skills and objectives partially based on student needs assessments completed between September 1987 and March 1988, prior to publication. The following points are representative of typical student objectives listed in the Goals and Objectives part:

#### Listening Skills

Students should be able to:

- recognize tone of voice (stress and intonation) and body language as clues for attitudes, feelings and register;
- make references as to time, place, personal characteristics, motives, previous or successive events, cause/effect;
- develop an awareness of good listening strategies such as predicting and guessing, confirming and disconfirming, etc.

#### Communicative Skills

Students should be able to:

- ask for and give factual information;
- express and ask about feelings, attitudes, opinions, ideas, etc.
- describe people, objects, places, sequences of events;

- socialize (including conversation management strategies).

### Reading Skills

Students should be able to read for the following purposes:

- to be current with world events;
- to understand functional materials (forms, labels, notices) and materials appropriate to their work (instructions, letters, reports, manuals, etc.);
- to recognize and use words and patterns that signal relationships of time and order, listing, cause/effect, and comparison/contrast;
- to distinguish fact, fiction, opinion, bias, propaganda, etc.

### Writing Skills

Students should be able to:

- generate and organize ideas in descriptive and narrative modes;
- use Advanced level grammatical structures appropriately;
- revise content for meaning (clarity, organization, elaboration of ideas, etc.) in order to communicate effectively with the reader;
- use paragraphs and parts of the composition (introduction, discussion, conclusion) appropriately.

The Grammar section of the curriculum is presented in a different format. There are notes to the instructor on teaching grammar including how to

present a grammar point and how to correct errors. The final part of the section is a list of grammar points to be covered. I created a grammar checklist based on this list (see Appendix A) as a resource for designing the syllabus.

The course, *Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations*, combines ESL training and introductory content in the Hospitality area for adult ESL immigrant students at Vancouver Community College. The content instruction does not focus upon vocational training for specific jobs, but on various linguistic aspects of the tourism industry and, particularly on the language needed for customer service positions within that industry. The course is designed as a language course and is not intended to be a job training course. Students' English language study requirements are determined by documented progress reports from instructors or the English Language Assessment (ELA) test which is administered by the Assessment Centre at King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College and is provincially recognized. Students have to have a minimum English placement recommendation of Lower Advanced. Students with an Upper Advanced level placement recommendation are also accepted, but assessed at the end of the course using different criteria. Student self-identification and selection, or previous teacher recommendation determines appropriateness in terms of content area interest.

Informal expressions of interest for Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL), and a sufficient number of registered students for the course determined that it was viable. There was no specific needs analysis done. The first session of the course was offered September to December 1994. Fourteen students were enrolled. An informal survey of student needs conducted in the first week of class showed that students had enrolled for three different reasons. Two students in the class planned to take, or were taking vocational training in the Tourism and Hospitality area, but needed to upgrade their English for pre-requisite purposes and to learn basic vocabulary and concepts. For example, one student was concurrently enrolled in the Culinary Arts department at the City Centre campus of VCC, and another student planned to take the one-year Food and Beverage Management certificate program. Three students were simultaneously employed in the hospitality industry, but wanted to upgrade their language skills for promotion at their workplace. The majority of students (nine of the fourteen) viewed the content area as an opportunity to combine short-term career exploration and/or general interest with continued English language study.

### **Designing the Syllabus**

In order to prepare for the course, I was relieved from half-time teaching duties to do curriculum development. There was considerable time to

familiarize myself with the content area by reading native-speaker texts, previewing extensive video holdings, speaking with content area specialists at VCC's City Centre campus, taking the British Columbia provincial government's *SuperHost* and *SuperHost Leader* programs and reviewing published ESL materials focused on this content area.

Rather than providing a complete description of the syllabus, only those features relating to syllabus organization, design of the learning tasks, and methodology will be described. Figure 3.1 below summarizes these characteristics:

<p><b>Organization:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modular</li> <li>• Task-based</li> <li>• Content and language integrated</li> <li>• Linguistically graded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Learning Tasks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real-world texts</li> <li>• Theme-based</li> <li>• Linguistically multi-skilled</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Methodology:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">task-responsive Gatbonton and Gu's (1994) Communicative Methodology</p>	

**Figure 3.1.** Characteristics of the Syllabus

### **Organization of the Syllabus**

A modular, task-based, content and language integrated, and, to satisfy institutional requirements, graded approach was used as an organizational basis for the syllabus. Content was organized into one, two or three week modules based on themes taken from the Hospitality and Tourism field. The objective of organizing the content into themes was to provide students with a broad overview of the occupational field. Because of its diversity, the tourism industry is difficult to define. The eight sector grid of the tourism industry was envisioned in *Tourism: The Quest for Professionalism* in 1986 by the Pacific Rim Institute of Tourism and has since been adopted as the official tourism sector designation for British Columbia and Canada. The eight tourism sectors were used as a basis for the thematic modules with two additional themes: Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality, and Customer Service (see Figure 3.2). A theme to consider adding in subsequent terms, as a response to student requests, will be Canadian Job Search Skills. Most students, even those not seeking employment, wanted to use the computer lab to create their own résumé.

<b>Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations</b>	
Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality .....	one week
Customer Service .....	two weeks
Food and Beverage .....	one week
Attractions .....	one week
Adventure Tourism .....	one week
Accommodation .....	two weeks
Events and Conferences .....	one week
Transportation .....	one week
Travel Trade .....	one week
Tourism Services .....	one week
[Summary and Testing .....	three weeks]

**Figure 3.2.** Organization of Thematic Modules

### **Thematic Modules**

The thematic modules are designed to be used independently from one another and in any order, with the exception of the Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality which should be the first module in the course and the Summary and Testing which should be the last module. Each theme is explored using a variety of learning tasks and experiences. The course was organized with the Customer Service module immediately following the Introductory module because the concepts of effective customer service underlie all other areas;



however, it may also be useful to teach this module later in the course, or to divide it into two sections.

A module is defined as a series of two and a half hour lessons on the same theme; there are four lessons in a week. One lesson may have one or more tasks; usually, at least two or three tasks make up a lesson. The tasks were presented with the specific rules and procedures that the students needed to know in order to carry out each task. Students also needed to rely on their general background knowledge, including cross-cultural knowledge, in order to understand the meaning, implications, and consequences of each task.

Cognitive skills (e.g., how to classify information), learning strategies (e.g., sequencing the information within an acceptable format), and linguistic skills were at times required for the students to perform each task satisfactorily.

### **Integrating Language and Content in the Learning Tasks**

The learning tasks became the bridges between language and content. As a teacher/planner, the first goal was to identify the rules and procedures that the students would need to know in order to carry out each task, and to determine whether their general background knowledge was sufficient for each task. Another goal was to represent these tasks so that cognitive skills such as classifying or sequencing information could be presented in a visual way that the students could do independently. Tasks were then related to linguistic

knowledge such as aspects of grammar and vocabulary, and ways of using collaborative learning and learning strategies were considered.

Integrating language and content (ILC) also means that the processes used by students to acquire knowledge resembles the usual processes native speakers might use when expanding their knowledge of the field. Thus, for students to learn about the Canadian workplace, the associated concerns of employers and their ways of thinking, the activities require them to gather, classify, synthesize and convey information about these issues just as they would if they were employees or, if the tasks were academically oriented, students in the Hospitality field.

A task in the Events and Conferences module illustrates this integration of language and content (see Appendix B). In this learning task, the students role play two positions. The vocabulary specific to this module (i.e. participants, seminar, facilities, auditorium, flip charts, etc.) would have been covered in previous tasks in the module. Student A adopts the role of the sales representative for a medium-sized hotel and Student B adopts the role of conference organizer. Student A has a diagram of the hotel facilities and an information brochure. Student B has a list of requirements. Both students must scan the texts to locate the appropriate information and use the new vocabulary

in their responses; thereby integrating the content and the language by which they learn this content.

The dual objectives of both language and content were acknowledged by Vancouver Community College through the awarding of a “Statement of Completion” for mastery of the content area material and the distribution of report cards to validate language progress. Granting the Statement of Completion is determined by attendance, class participation and in-class multiple-choice tests, and the report cards listed student results on in-class marks and term-end final exams in the four skill areas of language proficiency and grammar. The students were familiar with the English language assessment system and understood the requirements as each progressive course is articulated to the next (i.e. Pre-Intermediate leads to Lower Intermediate leads to Upper Intermediate etc.). Students also know that they can eventually earn high school completion requirements if they choose to do so; therefore, taking *Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations* does not impede that goal.

### **Design of the Learning Tasks**

The learning tasks are designed to use real world language, be theme-based and linguistically multi-skilled. Learning tasks are classroom activities designed to promote the learning of linguistic knowledge and skills. Authentic materials as advocated by Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989, pp. 14-25) are

materials not originally designed for the purpose of language instruction. Real world is defined as genuinely communicative language as used in the occupational field of Tourism and Hospitality (workers in hotels or restaurants) or, language required in a non-ESL stream of a Hospitality and Tourism training course. Real world language is natural and not artificially constructed in order to teach a specific linguistic structure or vocabulary. Linguistically multi-skilled means that students review and are introduced to a variety of grammatical structures, language forms, functions and new vocabulary in different tasks at varying time intervals throughout the length of the course, and must develop different skills accordingly.

As a teacher/planner, my immediate focus was on the day-to-day teaching and learning activities; the tasks for each lesson were the basic building blocks of the course. For a goal such as: “Students completing Advanced should be able to read for the following purpose[s]: to understand functional materials (forms, labels, notices) and materials appropriate to their work (instructions, letters, reports, manuals, etc.).”<sup>1</sup> I would examine a particular piece of text (a reading from a native speaker text, or from an ESL workbook, or some authentic company literature from a hotel chain, etc.) and decide on a

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<sup>1</sup> This goal is listed on page 3-3 of the *ELS Advanced Level Curriculum Guide*.

task or sequence of tasks which required the learner to extract and transform the key information contained in the text in some way (for example, by completing a diagram or filling in a chart). A text (Sampson, 1980) “is a sequence of sentences which forms a whole or a coherent piece of a whole. Texts may be spoken or written” (p. viii).

I would also determine which linguistic aspects of the content learners would need to engage in to complete the task successfully. This might include finding the meaning of a range of vocabulary items, comprehending logical relationships, or understanding an aspect of adjective clauses. I might write separate exercises for these or incorporate linguistic aspects into the task itself, and the items would be checked off against the linguistic skills as listed in the *ELS Advanced Level Curriculum Guide*. Grammar points would be checked off against the Grammar Checklist (see Appendix A).

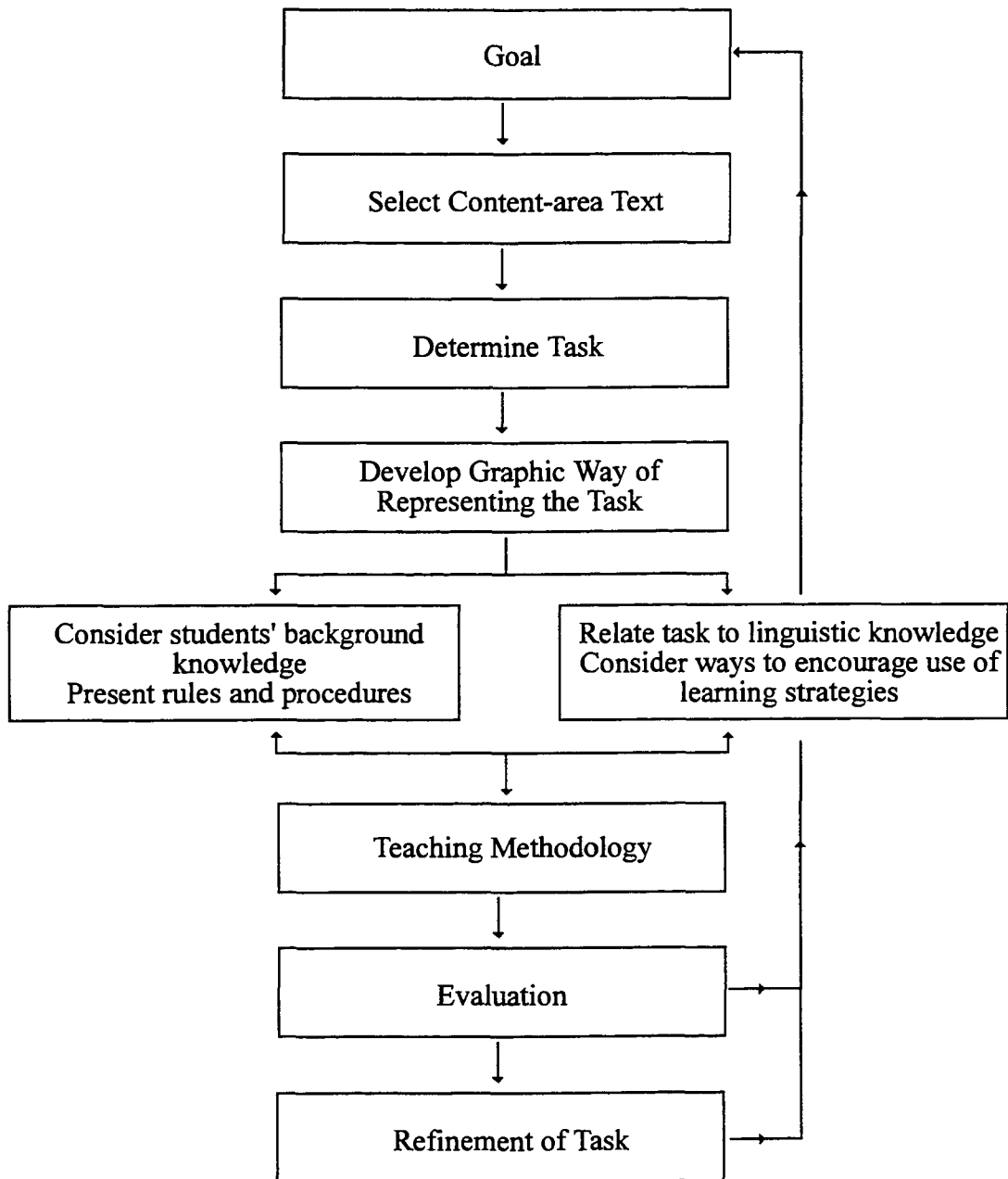
As in a regular stream Advanced Level ESL class, there was no prescribed order for linguistic items to be taught. My students were familiar with the linguistic skills listed in the guide as they informally ensured I was covering the curriculum with their friends or former classmates in regular stream Advanced Level ESL classes. After teaching a particular task I would make notes to myself on areas that students had difficulty with (for example, vocabulary or grammatical structures they were unfamiliar with) and make

further refinements to the task for the next time I used it with another group of students. The evolutionary nature of the syllabus design was flexible enough for me to revisit points that students had trouble with by readjusting goals for subsequent tasks. In this way, the syllabus evolved in the course of preparing the program.

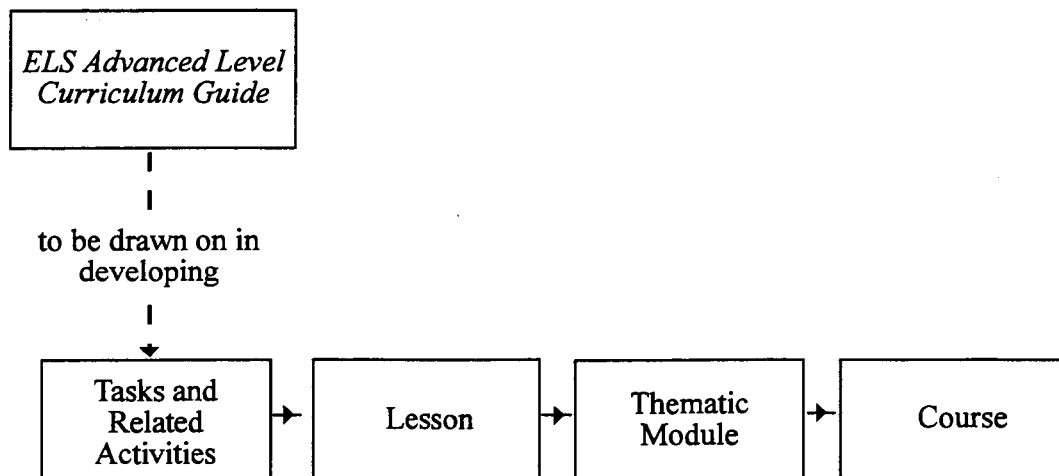
This process of designing the learning tasks is visually represented in Figure 3.3.

In this process, content-area texts and tasks are selected and developed in tandem so that content can develop task and vice versa. The tasks are also designed to interest and motivate students who may have a wide range of language competencies, interests and experiences in the Tourism and Hospitality industry. “Unless the learning tasks are embedded in materials that might lead to cognitive or affective growth, there will be in fact no external or internal motivation for learning English” (Sampson, 1980, p. ix).

Figure 3.3 shows a feedback loop where the results of the task evaluation lead to a refinement of the task which may be fed back into the goals. The resulting development of other tasks and their further impact on the goals thereby builds the course syllabus. The building of the course syllabus is represented in Figure 3.4.



**Figure 3.3.** Designing the Learning Tasks



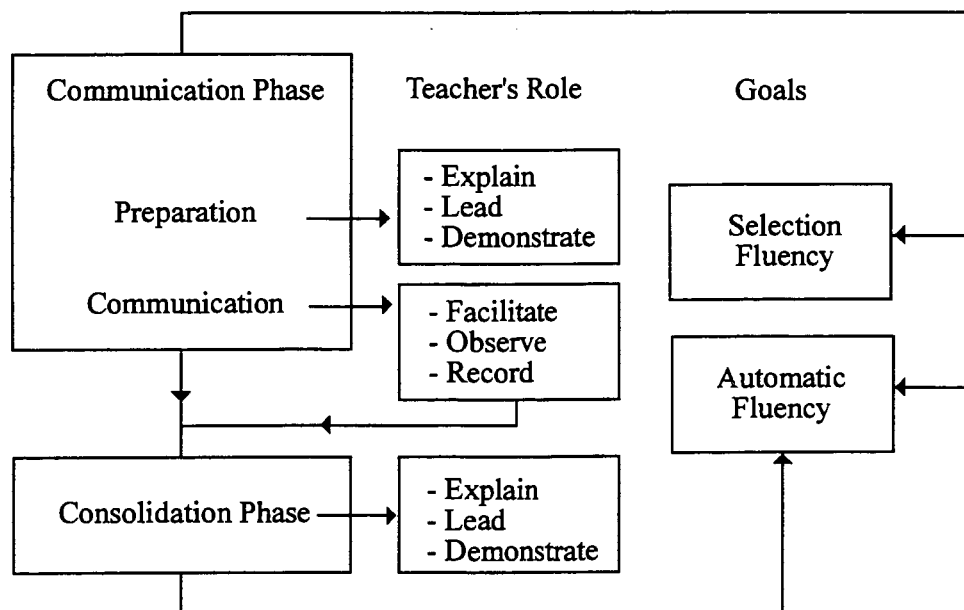
**Figure 3.4.** Building the Syllabus

### **Methodology**

Task-based theorists see curriculum planning as an integrated set of processes. Methodological concerns become de-emphasized. As a teacher/planner, I needed more specific methodological guidance. Gatbonton and Gu (1994, pp. 9-29) discuss a curriculum development project in which they opted for a task-based syllabus design and then searched for a suitable methodology. The methodology they originated is comprised of two phases: a Communication Phase and a Consolidation Phase. The Communication Phase is defined as one where genuine interactions are encouraged; the Consolidation Phase is where focused practice on a careful analysis of the formal properties of language is held (Gatbonton & Gu, 1994, pp. 26-27). The Consolidation Phase



is dependent on the Communication Phases for its aims and procedure. This methodology is graphically presented in Figure 3.5.



**Figure 3.5.** Gatbonton and Gu's (1994) Communicative Methodology

In the preparation part of the Communication Phase, the teacher explains the procedure and elicits or explains the purpose of each task. The teacher tries to generate curiosity, draw out students' background knowledge and bring up any foreseen difficulties. During the Communication Phase itself students participate in inherently communicative and repetitive tasks that are oriented towards eliciting a critical mass of utterances. This methodology presupposes

that fluency precedes mastery. In order to develop fluency, the learner is encouraged to produce lots of language - not all of it necessarily correct.

According to Gatbonton and Gu (1994, p. 20), this Communication Phase can provide opportunities for on-the-spot teaching and learning. The student slowly refines hypotheses about language by speaking and being understood, or by being provided with corrective feedback from the listener. The freedom to make errors is a characteristic of the language learning during the Communication Phase.

In the Consolidation Phase, students focus on language that they used during the Communication Phase, particularly, that which gave them difficulties. Part of the teacher's role is to observe and record student interaction during the Communication Phase; the teacher can then have students participate in form-focused activities based on these observations or do prepared exercises based on the texts used in the Communication Phase. Depending on students' needs, activities could be fluency and accuracy-oriented, form-focusing activities such as analysing the formal properties of specific utterances (e.g. structure, pronunciation, intonation, stress, etc.) or activities examining linguistic content (e.g. nuances of meaning, use of conversational gambits or idioms, socio-cultural uses, the organization of knowledge, etc.), or all three.

To illustrate how this methodology provides guidance to the teacher/planner, refer to the task listed in Appendix C. For the Preparation Phase, I drew out background knowledge by writing the word role play on the board and having the students explain their ideas around the concept. I then confirmed or clarified their explanations and explained the procedure and purpose of the activity.

After dividing the class into groups of three, I presented each group with a text describing the situation (see Appendix C). After giving the students sufficient time to read, I elicited vocabulary words that they didn't understand and wrote them on the blackboard. The following words were listed: guest privileges, bonuses, efficient, reliable, Human Resources, job security and flexible. We discussed the meanings and I ensured the students understood the situation and the purpose of the discussion. In order to create interest in the task, I asked the students if they knew someone who had been in a similar situation. I also asked if they found the issue relevant to the changing workplace in Canada. The students then chose roles, and put away the text to ensure that they didn't refer to it.

During the Communication Phase, the students adopted their respective roles. They discussed the situation and worked towards finding a solution. A substantial amount of language was produced because the learners were engaged

in the task and expecting to arrive at an outcome. During the Communication Phase, I circulated among the groups and facilitated the discussion by answering questions about vocabulary or modelling appropriate phrases. I offered “on-the-spot” teaching if asked, but tried not to interrupt the speakers. I noted typical errors which I later used as part of the focused practise in the Consolidation Phase.

After fifteen minutes, I asked the students to stop their discussions and we quickly circled the room to compare solutions. To refocus the students onto language learning and as a transition from the Communication Phase to the Consolidation Phase, I asked the students to take five minutes to reflect on their discussion and to describe their method of problem solving in a group.

Although there was never one simple approach that would work for all kinds of problems, the following list describes their basic process:

1. Analyze the problem
2. Suggest a variety of solutions
3. Evaluate the solutions
4. Select the best solution

This list provided the opportunity to review some of the language functions in a formalized manner. I put some of the functions on the blackboard, and the students brainstormed for additional language suggestions.

I offered phrases and corrected errors that I had observed during the Communication Phase. Some of our phrases were:

1. *Analysing the problem*

In my opinion, \_\_\_\_\_.

As far as I'm concerned, \_\_\_\_\_.

As I see it, \_\_\_\_\_.

Personally, I think \_\_\_\_\_.

It seems to me \_\_\_\_\_.

I think \_\_\_\_\_.

I believe \_\_\_\_\_.

2. *Suggesting a variety of solutions*

Let's \_\_\_\_\_.

Perhaps we could \_\_\_\_\_.

We might \_\_\_\_\_.

Why don't we \_\_\_\_\_.

Why not \_\_\_\_\_.

What about \_\_\_\_\_.

How about \_\_\_\_\_.

I suggest \_\_\_\_\_.

3. ***Evaluating the solutions***

I think \_\_\_\_\_ - is best.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - isn't practical.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - would work best.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - wouldn't work.

Which solution do you - agree with?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - like best?

Unfortunately, \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm sorry, but \_\_\_\_\_.

Well the problem is \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm not sure - that will be possible.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - that will work.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - that will help.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - that will be necessary.

I'm afraid that might not - work.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - help.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ - be possible.

4. ***Selecting the Best Solution***

What do you mean?

Do you mean \_\_\_\_\_.

I don't quite follow.

I'm not sure what you mean.

Sorry, but I don't - understand what you mean.

- see what you mean

- get what you mean

Yes, that's a good idea.

Yes, why don't we try that.

Okay, let's try that.

According to Gathbonton and Gu (1994),

the success of this methodology depends on how well the different phases are integrated. Integration of these phases is achieved not only by making the Preparation Phase focus upon getting the students receptive and ready to do the activities of the Communication Phase. It is also achieved by making the Consolidation Phase dependent upon what difficulties may have been experienced during the Communication Phase. (p. 19)

### **Conclusion**

Until recently, curriculum implementation often meant taking a previously prepared syllabus and putting it into practice in an instructional setting. Content was frequently specified for particular groups of learners and norms were provided to facilitate assessment and evaluation. The process was usually unidirectional--from curriculum developers to teachers to students--with varying degrees of support along the way.

This process has often been unsatisfying for teachers. Ownership is a necessary part of change. I sought out the opportunity to design the new course *Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations* and I approached my Department Head with the idea; I was excited by the challenge of applying some of the ideas I had gained from doing graduate course work at Simon Fraser University in the Faculty of Education. Conditions that supported this project included: a personal vision and focus, departmental freedom to experiment and take risks, collaboration with colleagues, the guidance of a model, time, a work environment that was conducive to reflective thinking, and appreciation for learning as an ongoing, constructive and self-directed process. The process of trying to adapt a task-based model which has emerged from the view that curriculum development and implementation are concurrent and interrelated was not unidirectional. A curriculum cannot be prescriptive because each teacher must design appropriate learning tasks to address students' needs, interests and abilities in each different teaching context.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TASK-BASED SYLLABUS**

#### **Introduction and Clarification of Terms**

In Chapter Four, the process of adapting a task-based model for syllabus design and the model itself is analysed. The reflections are analysed within the same framework the task-based model was presented in, as outlined in Chapter Two, for organizational and comparative purposes.

Task-based syllabus design is an expression of an emergent paradigm in language teaching. This new vision of syllabus design asks that teacher/planners view their work in a completely new way. Eventually, this emergent paradigm will either be assimilated into the prevailing one, or the new paradigm will gain momentum and develop so that it replaces its predecessor. This intervening phase will continue to be a confusing period for our profession. My individual experience in trying to adopt a task-based approach to syllabus design was parallel. I did not wholly succeed in adopting the new syllabus design as envisioned by theorists, rather I adapted and assimilated some aspects into my existing views.

### Reflective Analysis

As teachers, it is important to value and validate our own experience in the classroom, and not always to try to follow what the “experts” say.

Reflection can be a tool for learning about qualitative issues as one moves through a project, but is not necessarily the way to evaluate the project’s success. Support, tension, change, power, authority, commitment, and other qualitative issues are extremely complex and difficult to determine directly, partly because of the difference between reality and perception. Teacher reflection, as case-study research, is vulnerable to charges of not being generalizable across a variety of situations, with a variety of subjects. However, I believe this is measuring its value by the wrong criterion.

A case study is valid to the reader to whom it gives an accurate and useful representation of the bounded system. Researchers look for ways to directly and indirectly confirm their observations, and readers of case studies participate in the effort to understand the validity of the observations. (Wolcott, 1988, p. 263)

Both a limitation and strength of teacher reflection is the reliance on only one source of information. There may be the tendency to oversimplify one’s interpretation, to make things manageable and to reduce the complexity of the issues. Course design is complex; to keep probing for more, rather than fewer factors that may be involved is the challenge. The meaning of the experience

from my point of view and frame of reference may have useful implications for other teachers and projects in the future.

### Needs Analysis

In a teaching situation where the teacher/planner favours a task-based approach, the needs analysis, theoretically, should focus on tasks that the student will need to do either in their work place or in a specialized academic field. A needs analysis conducted prior to teaching the course or right at the start of the course was not feasible for three main reasons: institutional requirements, student perspectives, and teacher perspectives. The semi-negotiated, ongoing needs analysis advocated by task-based theorists, was an effective, viable alternative.

Because of the institutional requirements (i.e. following the *ELS Advanced Level Curriculum Guide*), I knew that I would have less opportunity to be responsive to students' communicative needs than theory suggested. The students' language skills had been previously assessed either by their former teacher or through the Assessment Centre at VCC and were therefore not true indicators of their communicative needs but assignments into a predetermined series of levels.

In practice, conducting a needs analysis at the start of the course may not provide direction for the teacher. Students are not always able to articulate

their needs. This may be due to lack of English proficiency or due to cross-cultural differences. In traditional education cultures, the teacher is viewed as the authority and therefore the “knower” of needs. Indicating needs and participating in the design of the syllabus is not the usual student role. The offering of extensive choices by the teacher may be viewed as demonstrating insufficient planning on the teacher’s part.<sup>1</sup> A lack of student articulateness may also be due to personality type--for some people it is difficult to ask for what they need, especially in a public setting, and it is sometimes difficult to self-identify needs. In addition, student needs change over the 4-month length of the course. What is identified as a need at the beginning of the course may not be a need three months later.

Thirdly, task-based theorists do not state that teaching is totally student needs driven. I tried to meet different student needs (i.e. to be more or less occupationally focused) at different times and I hope that the course satisfied at least some needs, some of the time for all students. In addition, while I try to create a democratic atmosphere in my classroom where students feel comfortable expressing their needs, views or complaints, I also know that my plan dominates. In order to maintain my own goals of covering the institutionally required curriculum and introducing to students an overview of

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see: Penner (1995).

the content material, I needed to follow a plan. Because I am task and goal oriented myself, I teach and plan while thinking ahead to the next course. If I am truly responsive to student needs, there is the possibility that the next course will be totally different than this course. While I expect and want change for each course, I also need continuity. If I have to continually develop new, untried materials I feel I can never gain competence.

### Syllabus Design

Some of my practical needs as a teacher could not be satisfied by a wholesale adoption of the process orientation of thought to syllabus design. I agree philosophically that the syllabus only has an indirect influence upon actual language learning. There are countless variables which intervene between the planning of a syllabus and the actual learning, and they must be constantly subject to negotiation and reinterpretation by teachers and learners in the classroom. However, I needed a tangible, organizational plan to give shape to my teaching. Long and Crookes (1992, p. 46) argue for a semi-negotiated syllabus that is somewhat preplanned and guided. They argue in terms of efficiency or relevance to students' needs. They suggest that others could object to the lesser degree of learner autonomy that such a structure produces, but I found security in their suggestion.

As a teacher I see the impact of a student's affective state on her learning; students with healthy self-esteems and feelings of competence as learners are more open to learning. Shouldn't we then, as teachers, create situations for ourselves in which we nurture affective states that are therefore conducive to good teaching? The adaptation from teaching general ESL to teaching content-based ESL felt very natural to me. The organizational principles inherent in each theme I chose provided me with an array of language items and possible tasks to develop. Using a theme-based structure was easily adapted to existing institutional curricula and the topics were selected to match student interest so they were also supportive of the adaptation. Students told me they found it a more "interesting" way of studying English.

Although only the theme-based units, not the tasks were preplanned, the course outline provided me with continuity and direction. The syllabus is now a record which provides guidance to myself the next time I teach the course, to colleagues who may teach it in the future, to learners, and to Vancouver Community College. Students appreciated having a printed course outline too; they often referred to it and ensured that I followed it. Students felt safe to negotiate alternative plans to the course outline because they saw the organizational goal for the term. Candlin (1984) suggests that what a syllabus consists of can really only be discerned after a course is over, by observing not

what was planned, but what took place. The plan itself may therefore be used as a tool to reflect on what happened.

Much of the responsibility for curriculum decisions rested with me, the teacher/planner. To become an effective decision-maker, I had to increase my awareness and knowledge of possible approaches to learning and teaching, as well as strategies and skills for assessing students. As I experimented with alternatives to suit different situations, exciting new ideas emerged concurrently with feelings of anxiety. Working with creative tension was a challenge, because I had to have a realistic sense of the present (my students' needs and my usual, known way of teaching) and also to believe in my capacity to transform and ultimately improve my teaching. I needed enthusiasm for learning, courage to experiment, an attitude of inquiry, willingness to collaborate, and thoughtful reflection. This self-imposed situation also produced anxiety and real concerns over the possibility of failure.

I felt tension between my new beliefs and daily experience that curriculum development and implementation are concurrent and interrelated processes, and the co-existing expectations (institutional and my own) that curriculum implementation means taking a prepared program and putting it into practice in an instructional setting. Concurrent curriculum planning and implementation is itself a process of innovation. As an individual

teacher/planner, I felt I needed to have expertise and knowledge about the direction and nature of the change I was pursuing, with an understanding of and an ability to deal with the factors and strategies inherent in that process of change.

### **Methodology Design**

In the task-based literature, the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology has blurred. It seems straightforward to suggest that methodological concerns are driven by tasks; however, in practice this requires extensive knowledge of different pedagogical options on the part of the teacher. Even with an extensive knowledge of pedagogical options, I am not sure the tasks inherently “suggest” one particular methodological choice over another.

Certainly each task can be presented in a different way. For example, the task “write a letter of complaint” can be presented in a very traditional teacher-fronted way. The teacher could present students with a model letter. Alternative phrases to those contained in the model could be drilled in substitution-style drills and then the students could write their own letters following the model based on a teacher-provided scenario. The teacher might then mark the errors according to an error checklist and the students could re-write the letter the next day. Or, the same task can be presented in a more process-oriented, student-centred way. In small groups, students could



brainstorm a real-life scenario in which they have a complaint. Phrases could be jotted down on flip chart paper and compared by all members of the class. A letter format could be decided on by group consensus. Students could then write their first draft of the letter individually, but get together in pairs for peer revision. There could be a schedule of student-led conferences with the teacher to re-work the second draft. The final version could then be sent to the newspaper or the company in order to file the complaint.

In the above example, two approaches (traditional/communicative) are contrasted. This juxtaposition is not meant to foster stereotypical images or overgeneralization, nor to show that one approach is better than the other. The example shows that by de-emphasizing the need to define the form that task-based instruction should take, advocates of it leave practising teachers with little guidance and the sense that anything goes. Surely, some set of pedagogical options will be more effective in some clearly defined contexts than others. Sheen (1994, p. 133) advocates further research into the relative beneficial effects of specific forms of instruction in specific contexts, taking into account the classroom behaviours of all concerned.

Some theorists (Breen, 1987; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Hutchison & Waters, 1987) claim that emphasis upon the learning process as appropriate content suggests methodological concerns for teachers using a task-based

approach. One suggestion is to involve learners in designing or selecting tasks. Perhaps after teaching *Advanced ESL for Tourism and Customer Relations* a number of times, I may have the confidence and wealth of tasks or experiences necessary for this suggestion. I can envision a time when learners could play a much larger role in selecting tasks and truly learning language to learn.

### Materials Writing

The most important aspect of the development of successful task-based materials is the time available in order to do so. As a teacher/planner, I was responsible for selecting tasks, adapting and modifying commercially available tasks, and creating new tasks. Content area texts and tasks were developed in tandem. The four basic questions I asked myself regarding task selection were:

- a) does the task provide communicative opportunities for language learning?
- b) does the task satisfy some of the students' needs or goals?
- c) Is the task authentic (or, at least, does it elicit authentic language)?
- d) Does the task cover any of the linguistic objectives listed in the *ELS*

*Advanced Level Curriculum Guide?*

Secondly, while the selection of tasks is facilitated by the ongoing, informal, student needs analysis, determining task difficulty and sequencing pedagogic tasks poses greater concern. Long and Crookes (1992, p. 46)

suggest the need for parameters or operational terms in assessing task classification and difficulty. Further concerns Long and Crookes (1992, p. 46) refer to are: the lack of boundaries surrounding pedagogic tasks, that tasks overlap, that some are vaguely defined, that many tasks have subtasks, and the nature of the relationship between tasks (if any), and so on.

### Goals

Nunan (1989, p. 49) writes that the goal of each task is not always stated but may be inferred from an examination of the task. My criticism of this is similar to my criticism of the task-based rejection of the concept of method; the teacher is provided with little guidance. Nunan (1989, p. 49) writes that learning goals may relate to a range of general outcomes (communicative, affective or cognitive) or may describe teacher or learner behaviour. These goals are very vague and cover a vast range of outcomes that may occur in class. There is the major assumption that the communicative interaction entailed in task work will trigger language acquisition. While this may occur, it is difficult to assess what is learned in each specific task because the goals are so general. What particular skill(s) is the task trying to develop?

Long and Crookes (1992) concede that SLA research findings may be too recent, inadequate in scale or not rigorous in methodology. This concession seriously erodes their initial rationale for advocating the adoption of a task-

based approach. Moreover, some educators (Egan, 1983; Sampson, 1984a; 1984b) argue that it is impossible for curriculum development and/or instructional techniques to be purely scientific. They suggest that because education is not a technological domain but a social domain, only the findings of educational theory can feed directly into teaching practice. The role then of educational theory is to evaluate the appropriateness of findings in scientific theories for practical educational purposes.

As a teacher I want more specificity; I need to have the guidance of some stated goals. The adoption of Gathbonton and Gu's (1994) Communicative Methodology satisfied this need for specificity that was not addressed by the task-based theorists. The methodology provided balance. If goals and methodology are too specifically prescribed, I feel that my professional judgement, personal style and experience is neither acknowledged or valued; but if the goals are only to be inferred, I feel there is too little guidance. In addition, because I want to make learning goals and objectives explicit to students in ways that they are understood in order to guide them in their own language learning, I need specific goals.

### **Input and Activities**

Many task-based theorists (Nunan, 1989; Prabhu, 1987) advocate the use of authentic materials. The definition of authentic is generally any material

which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching. Proponents of using authentic materials argue that if we want learners to comprehend aural and written texts in the real world, then learners need to use real-world language in class. The issue of task authenticity raises time concerns for the teacher/planner. There are a growing number of published ESP materials in a variety of occupational areas; researchers (Porter & Roberts, 1981) have found that materials written for TESL have a variety of features which make them different from authentic language. However, for practical and time considerations, I created both my own learning tasks and adapted published material.

To determine what mixture of authentic and published materials is valid, the teacher/planner must turn away from theorists and consult the findings of practice oriented researchers and/or experiential reports of other teacher/planners. The typology or task type (Pica, et al., in press) provided guidance in materials writing and task selection.

### **Teacher Roles**

Who is the vocational ESL teacher? At Vancouver Community College, almost always he or she is a general ESL teacher who has unexpectedly found him/herself teaching students with special vocational language needs. The teacher's training is usually in teaching English as a second language (TESL),

not in the specialized vocational area. Students' views regarding the role of the teacher and the nature of English language teaching in a vocational area may conflict. If the students expect that the VESL teacher should be an authority in the content area, they may find it hard to accept a teacher who is forced at times to admit ignorance of the content area. If the students believe that English language teaching should consist of practice in grammar and general vocabulary, they may well be disconcerted when the English teacher appears to be teaching content material. It is not uncommon in adult ESL classes for the teacher to see herself as a guide and catalyst for classroom communication, while the learners see her as someone who should be providing explicit instruction and modelling the target language.

These differences in perception have serious implications for daily classroom activities. What can we do as VESL teachers? In such situations, it is necessary to have consultation and negotiation between teachers and learners. In the preparation phase of each task (see Figure 3.5), the teacher helps the students understand the purpose and procedure. There is also the opportunity to discuss our respective roles and expectations. The teachers' roles in each phase of Gatlinton and Gu's (1994) Communicative Methodology are stated, which provides pedagogic guidance, but are still sufficiently broad (i.e. to explain, to facilitate, etc.) to accommodate interpretation.

VESL teachers can also develop professional competence by specialising in a particular discipline or vocational area. But to what level should the content-area ESL teacher realistically strive to master the content-area? Can the English for science and technology (EST) teacher be expected to absorb the values and symbols of science without the thoroughgoing training which scientists have? For EST teachers to understand a scientific text properly, they need to know the concepts and presuppositions involved. Ignorance of these means that the text as a whole may not be understood. Attention might then be devoted to lower level features of grammar and vocabulary.

In attempting to improve one's specialist knowledge in one small area, it is important not to lose sight of or underestimate the importance of the VESL teacher's role, which is that of language teacher and **not** specialist.

Undoubtedly, a knowledge of the content-area will be of help. However, the main value of knowledge of the content-area is to give the teacher confidence. The content-area ESL teacher's most effective role is as a teacher of things not learned as part of their content-area courses. The VESL teacher may take content material which is known to the students but present it from a different viewpoint in addition to exploiting it for language learning opportunities.

In my class, the majority of student errors were of general English. The tourism-related errors were usually recognisable and my content-area knowledge

was sufficient to correct the errors or they could be resolved using reference materials. The VESL teacher must know enough of the content in order to assess the content correctness of students' statements.

### Learner Roles

Some of the assumptions about learner roles made by theorists advocating a task-based approach do not hold up in the classroom. While most of my students had previously studied at Vancouver Community College, eleven out of fourteen had lived in Canada less than three years. Four students were from Taiwan, one was from China, one from Hong Kong, one from Vietnam, one from El Salvador and three were from the former Yugoslavia. None of the students had studied English in a North-American-style communicative classroom before arriving in Canada. Many of their attitudes towards teaching and learning had been formed in classrooms where the teacher used a more traditional approach.

At risk of oversimplification, the traditional approach can be characterized as a focus on the teacher's presentation of material, the textbook and grammar; whereas the communicative approach can be characterized as a focus on the learner, practice and skill development. The students' somewhat traditional educational values and attitudes contrasted with my own. In the traditional approach, the students are required to be able to memorize English



and answer discrete point grammatical questions, as creative use is believed to come later. Relationships are also clearly defined; the attitude towards the teacher is one of respect and reliance on the teacher's knowledge and authority. For some students, behaviour attached to the concept of respect and saving face prevents students from questioning their teachers. Questions imply that teachers have failed in their duty to impart knowledge clearly.

In order to fully participate in a task-based approach, students will have to redefine their roles in order to participate differently in their learning experience. Students will also need to adopt different learning strategies that are more conducive to task-based activities. The teacher needs to ease students into this new way of thinking by explaining the teaching and learning assumptions underlying teaching activities in order to contribute to the learners' understanding of their learning processes.

### **Settings**

I felt strongly that one of the surest ways to get real world language input for my students was to visit different tourism and hospitality related sites. I arranged for visits long in advance and tried to coordinate the timing, so that they occurred within the thematic unit that they were a part of. For example, we visited a large five-star hotel during the accommodation module. The person providing the tour would invariably use much of the vocabulary we had covered in class. Before leaving for each site, we would develop a task that involved

getting information from the person who gave us the tour. For example, before visiting the hotel the class was divided into groups of four. Each group had to brainstorm and write down a list of criteria they felt that a hotel needed to have in order to be awarded a five-star rating (i.e. the hotel needed to have a swimming pool, the hotel needed to have babysitting available, etc.). In order to provide structure for their brainstorming, I provided a list of all hotel departments and each group had to provide at least three criteria for each department. While we were on the visit, the tour guide answered many of the questions the students had. As a follow-up task in class, we compared our criteria sheets with the rating system used by the British Columbia Automobile Association hotel rating system.

In addition to providing authentic language input, I believe that changing the setting and leaving the classroom has three additional benefits. Firstly, students are exposed to a Canadian workplace that they might not ordinarily have the opportunity to see. There is much socio-cultural information to be discerned from this opportunity, such as seeing the working conditions behind the scenes, hearing some of the thinking about work ethics and company loyalty, etc. Secondly, removing students from the classroom setting allows different aspects of their personalities to emerge. Each new setting touches each student in a different way. Off-site visits may spark an experience, a

strength or a skill that is not brought out in the classroom setting. Thirdly, visits establish a sense of class bonding and students usually take on different roles than they ordinarily play in the classroom. I try to disengage myself from the planning process; although I book the tour and provide maps for directions, I let the students plan and rely on each other for transportation, costs and food arrangements if needed.

### Testing

It is perhaps in the area of testing that I had the most difficulty in adapting a task-based approach to teaching. Because I had no flexibility in terms of how I tested the students at the end of the term, it was ultimately impossible to fully use a task-based approach. The final examinations for the course were institutionally required for all students at the Advanced Level, and the students were tested for proficiency in the four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and grammar recognition separately. I believe that in providing opportunities to strengthen the intellect and develop the cognitive skills of ESL students, I cannot compartmentalise language. To speak, listen, read and write is to engage the mind in thinking; language and thought are interdependent. The final tests that were used were incompatible with my personal teaching beliefs, were not achievement tests based on content and, for the most part, did not have the students do tasks. Language educators view

testing from different world views. The required VCC proficiency tests did not emerge from the same approach as the task-based model which I adapted for use in syllabus design.

The students were familiar with and anxious about the fairly rigorous end of term testing system. The *washback effect*, teaching during the term in preparation for the final tests, posed a concern for both the students and myself. How much of the curriculum should be sensitive to preparing the students to pass the exit tests? Although, in general, the *washback effect* of the final examination should not be the guiding principle in the development of a curriculum, the importance of passing the tests in the students' lives had to be taken into account.

At Vancouver Community College, specific evaluation instruments have not yet been designed for the three VESL courses. The VCC proficiency tests did not accurately test real-life communication skills for Tourism and Hospitality oriented occupational and academic student goals. Content-area language testing in general is fraught with controversy, and "many a curricular innovation have been undone by failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation" (Savignon, 1991, p. 266). Another issue of concern that needs to be addressed is how to test the students' knowledge of the content. Is it

possible to test content-area knowledge without simultaneously testing language? How can we be sure where it is that students lack proficiency?

After we completed two modules (two or three weeks of lessons), I would give the students a short in-class multiple choice content-area quiz; however, I had serious questions about the value of these quizzes. What information did the quiz results provide me, or the individual students, with? I believe the quizzes provided an indication of the students' relative performance to each other, some impetus for students to review notes, and also indicated their ability to memorize and recall specific information. But did a high score indicate ability to use the language in a communicative way? Did it indicate a deep command of the content material?

### **Program Evaluation**

Summative evaluation occurs some time after the end of the course, for example one month or a year or more after. This type of evaluation attempts to ascertain the effectiveness of a program or course in preparing students for their subsequent work or study experience. Eleven out of fourteen students passed on to the study at the next English level. Therefore, by this basic evaluation the course was effective. But was it? Robinson (1991, pp. 66-68) suggests that there is some overlap between needs analysis and evaluation. If the needs analysis has been an ongoing process, acknowledging that students' needs

change as a course progresses, then an evaluator would wish to know whether these changes had been responded to or not. In my case, the writing of this thesis, and particularly this reflective analysis, is partially an evaluation of the program. Additional purposes in evaluating the course are: to guide future syllabus changes, to document events for others' thinking of running similar courses, to clarify objectives, and to identify any unintended outcomes of the syllabus innovation.

### **Conclusion**

Theorists Long and Crookes (1992, pp. 45-47) advocate for task-based language teaching based on claims that it is compatible with second language acquisition (SLA) research, that it has a principled approach to content selection, and that materials selection and methodology decisions are influenced by classroom-based research. Long and Crookes (1992, p. 46) recognize that no complete task-based language teaching, as they envision it, has been implemented or subjected to rigorous, controlled evaluation. While my work may not refute any of the arguments which support the advocacy of task-based theory, I offer a record of the practical experience of trying to adapt a task-based model to a particular teaching situation. Although I was not able to adopt a task-based model for syllabus design quite as task-based theorists envision, I

feel the model was invaluable to me as a teacher/planner. It served as a standard for imitation and comparison.

Personal and professional rewards gained from being involved in this innovative project were many. Firstly, I put myself into the challenging position of learning that I presumably put my students into. Learning, for both teachers and students, is influenced by background knowledge, prior experience, educational beliefs, personality, learning styles, attitudes, self-esteem and confidence. Teachers are also affected by environmental factors such as expectations of others, relationships with colleagues, access to models and mentors and time to reflect. Secondly, my professional knowledge was, ultimately, validated in the adaptation of curriculum resources and the creation and selection of materials. Thirdly, I enjoyed and sought change in order to revitalize my work life. New trends stimulated my excitement and enthusiasm. Hopefully, I explored possibilities and created a syllabus that others may build on and improve. By looking at the specific experiences of one person, we can often learn general or universal lessons from it.

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**Appendix A**



## Appendix A

### Grammar Checklist

- Adverb Clauses: degree/result (so/such ... that)
- Adverb Clauses: (if) general time
- Adverb Clauses: (if) past unreal time
- Adverb Clauses: (if) mixed time
- Adverb Clauses: manner (seems/looks like)
- Adverb Clauses: place (where, wherever)
- Adverb Clauses: reduction
- Adverb Clauses: contrast (whereas, while)
- Adverb Clauses: condition (unless, even if)
- Adverb Clauses: manner (as, as if, as though)
- Conjunctive Adverbs: later on
- Conjunctive Adverbs: then
- Conjunctive Adverbs: therefore
- Conjunctive Adverbs: however
- Conjunctive Adverbs: also
- Conjunctive Adverbs: otherwise, on the contrary
- Adjective Clauses: necessary vs. unnecessary
- Adjective Clauses: prepositions with which/whom
- Adjective Clauses: modifying the whole sentence
- Adjective Clauses: reduction
- Causatives: have/get something done
- Let/help + noun phrase + infinitive
- Adj./noun/verb + preposition + noun or gerund  
i.e. responsible for, possibility of, insist on
- Noun Clauses: as subject in a sentence
- Noun Clauses: as object in a sentence
- Noun Clauses: as object of a preposition

- Noun Clauses: who, whom
- Noun Clauses: whoever, whatever, wherever, etc.
- Noun Clauses: “it” as subject, referring to noun clause
- Noun Clauses: after verbs of urgency
- Infinitives: negation
- Infinitives: as subject, or subject complement
- Infinitives: as adjective, or adjective complement
- Infinitives: as adverb
- Infinitives: to replace noun/adj./adv. clauses
- Infinitives: with too, enough
- Gerunds: negation
- Gerunds: as subject in a sentence
- Gerunds: as object in a sentence
- Gerunds: possessive
- Gerunds: after prepositions
- Gerunds vs. Infinitives as objects: same meaning
- Gerunds vs. Infinitives as objects: different meaning

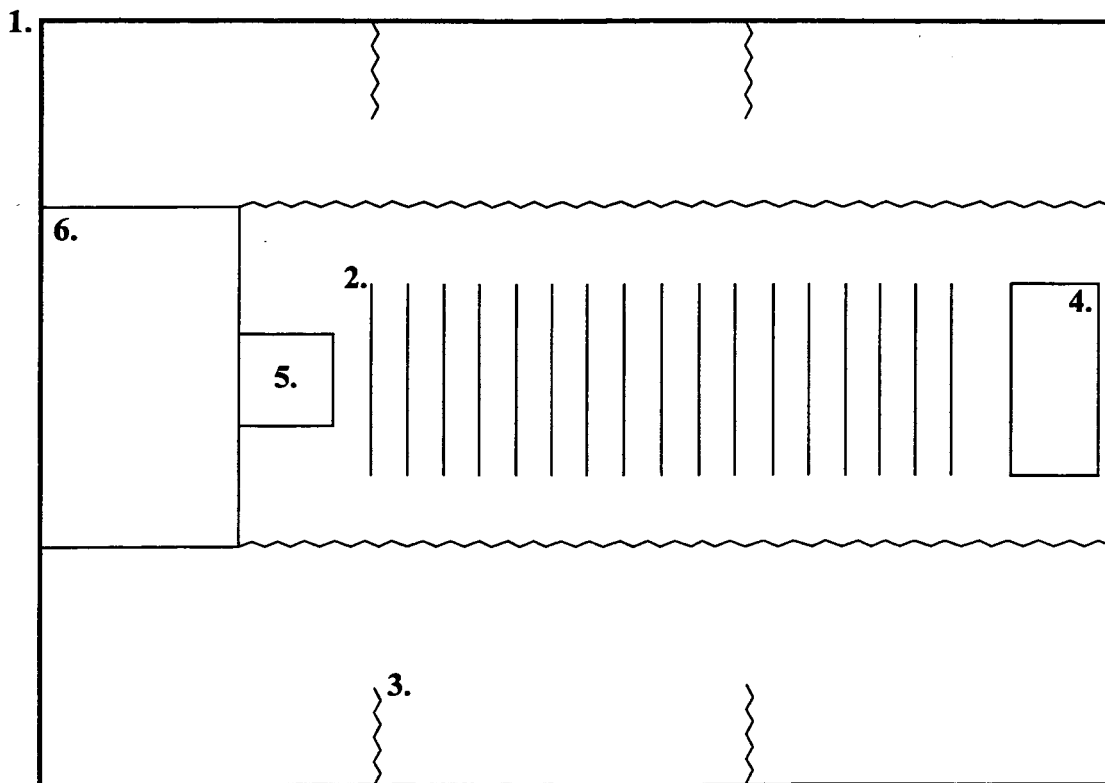
**Appendix B**

## Appendix B

### Student A

You are the sales representative for a medium-sized hotel that has on-site conference facilities. Student B wants to find out about your conference facilities, and to negotiate suitable rates with you.

#### Facilities



~~~~~ = folding partitions

1. **Multi-purpose conference hall.** This contains all the conference facilities and can be extended to include the side seminar rooms, using soundproof folding partitions.
2. **Main auditorium.** This is the centre of the multi-purpose hall, and seats 124. This can be used as a cinema.

3. **Seminar rooms.** On either side of the auditorium there is space for 110 seats. This space can be added to the main auditorium, or divided by folding partitions into six smaller seminar rooms, the smallest of which seats 26.
4. **Speakers platform.** The speakers platform is located at the front end of the main auditorium. On the speakers platform there is a table for five speakers. Behind it there is a film screen.
5. **Film projection room.** This room contains the audio-visual equipment and is located at the rear end of the main auditorium.
6. **Coffee bar.** This has a seating capacity of 40.

### Conference Equipment

- Every seat in the auditorium has a writing table and a microphone for use during debates.
- The rooms at the sides have their own conference equipment which can be used either together with that of the main auditorium or separately.
- Each seminar room has a video recorder, camera and monitor TV set for recording presentations and viewing them again.
- All normal conference equipment is available, including overhead projectors for transparencies, a photocopier, flip charts, word processing, etc.
- Portable equipment:
 

|                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| - Two 8mm film projectors   | - Three projection screens |
| - Eight overhead projectors | - Four tape recorders      |
| - Two VCRs                  | - Nine flip charts         |
- Fixed equipment:
  - One 35mm film projector
  - One 16mm film projector

**Rates**

Negotiable, depending on the number of participants staying in the hotel. Minimum rate is \$1000 per day. Audio-visual equipment, copying service, secretarial services, and food and beverage to be charged separately.

**Student B**

You are organizing a conference on behalf of the Canadian Students' Association. Talk to the sales representative of the hotel (Student A). Find out what is offered. Try to negotiate a suitable rate. The details of the conference are as follows:

Duration of conference: 4 days  
Number of participants: 120

Types of meetings include:

- Lectures to all participants
- Division into eight groups for seminars and workshops
- Video presentations in the seminar groups

Secretarial support required:

- One full-time secretary during the conference
- Full copying and typing services for production of handouts and photocopies

Other facilities:

- Refreshment facilities (coffee and light snacks to be made available at morning and afternoon coffee breaks)

You are willing to pay up to \$1200 a day for use of the conference premises. For this price you would expect the following facilities to be included:

- Use of audio-visual equipment, secretarial assistance, and use of the photocopier

You would not expect this price to include:

- Food or beverages
- Copies of handouts amounting to more than 100 pages per day

As part of the complete conference package, you would hope to have all participants staying in the hotel, with a discount on room rates.

**Appendix C**



## **Appendix C**

### **Task: Roleplay**

Your group should discuss the situation for fifteen minutes. You should try to reach a satisfactory agreement.

#### **Situation**

A medium-sized hotel employs many women as part-time workers in its Housekeeping Department. These workers receive a low hourly wage, and do not receive any of the benefits of the full-time workers. For example, they get no holiday pay or hotel guest privileges, no sick leave, no extended health insurance, no bonuses, and no pension plan. Many of these employees have been working at the hotel for many years and are efficient and reliable workers. A group of these part-time employees has asked the Human Resources Manager to change their positions into permanent part-time jobs. This means that the workers will have job security plus the benefits of the full-time workers. At the same time, their schedules will still be flexible enough to allow them to take care of their family responsibilities. The Human Resources Manager says that the hotel cannot afford the cost of these extra benefits. Also, if the hotel is going to pay out full benefits, it can just as easily hire full-time workers. The Human Resources Manager has agreed to arrange a meeting with the General Manager and a representative of the part-time employees to discuss the issue.

#### **Purpose of the Discussion**

The purpose of this discussion is for the group members to decide what, if any, action should be taken to satisfy the demands of the part-time workers.

#### **Roles in the Discussion**

General Manager  
Human Resources Manager  
Representative of the part-time employees