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Université Hassiba Benbouali de Chlef

Faculté des Langues Etrangères

Département d'anglais

**Polycopies des Cours**


**Module : Curriculum Design and Evaluation (Module annuelle)**

**Durée de la Séance : 3 heures par Semaine**

**Crédits : 04**

**Coefficient: 02**

**TD & Cours**

**Niveau : Master 1 (Applied Linguistics and ELT)**

**Enseignant : Dr .Aissa HANIFI**

**Année Universitaire : 2024/2025**

**Course Description**:

The curriculum design course appears at the right time in the path of applied linguistic Master students. It synthesises all they have learnt in ELT modules at the licence level and prepares them for their job after graduation. It is an amalgam of three main modules: discourse analysis, educational psychology and didactics. It comprises both the theory of major concepts and the practice of teaching methods. Besides attending lectures, students will be required to do home assignments to consolidate understanding. The students will also be oriented to relevant sources to do further research and course preparation.

The course introduces students to the ideas and procedures involved in curriculum development, innovation and evaluation. It will enable students to ensure that the approaches to learning and teaching, and appreciation of knowledge as well as of innovative practice. The course will inevitably examines some general and basic issues related to designing a curriculum with more consideration to be given to teaching of values, as well as design, development and evaluation of curricula and the implementation of innovative curricula.

## Course Objectives

The curriculum design course opts for the following objectives :

- To expose students to the course design history and worldwide curriculum design frameworks
- To understand and use curriculum design and evaluation frameworks
- To critically examine issues in curriculum development and evaluation, including the roles of various stakeholders in decision-making about curriculum, the pros and cons of a national curriculum, and the characteristics of quality learning experiences.
- To train students on how to design a course appropriately .
- To develop students' critical thinking to enable them for appropriate course evaluation.
- To prepare students for their future academic and professional career.

**Course Readings and Materials :**

There are two required books for the class: Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. New York, NY: Touchstone.
Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by Design, 2nd Ed. ASCDo

## Course Syllabus

1- **Lecture One : Definitiions , historical development , vocabulary and grammar selection**

2- **Lecture Two : Selection**

3- **Lecture Three : From Syllabus to Curriculum Design Selection**

4- **Lecture Four : Defining The Context**

5- **Lecture Five : Articulating Beliefs**

6- **Lecture Six : Conceptualizing Content**

7- **Lecture Seven : Formulating Goals and Objectives**

8- **Lecture Eight : Assessing Needs From Syllabus to Curriculum Design**

9- **Lecture Nine :Organising The Course**

**Lecture One: Definitiions , historical development , vocabulary and grammar selection**

**Aim :**

By the end of this lecture , students will have an idea about how the idea of curriculum design developed through history υ Students will also learn to differentiate between course and syllabus design.

**Definitions**

The history of curriculum development in language teaching starts with the notion of syllabus design.

However, syllabus design is one aspect of curriculum development but is not identical with it. υAlthough the term "syllabus" is often interchanged with "curriculum", the word is usually used to signify only course content and how it is ordered.

Yet ,

A curriculum is the description of how that prescribed set of things will be taught and learned. In other words, the curriculum is the complete structure of the course, including needs analysis, syllabus, materials, assessments, and course evaluation.

**Historical Developments**

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Curriculum development in language teaching as we know it today really began in the 1960s., ( attempts of syllabus design in language teaching much earlier.)
This appeared as a urgent call for changes in approaches and methods in language.

There was a quest for better methods.

• Many methods have come and gone in the last 1OO years in pursuit of the "best method," as the following chronology illustrates, with dates suggesting periods of greatest dominance:

It's fascinating to see how educational methods have evolved over time in the quest for the "best method." Here's a brief overview of some key methods and their periods of dominance:

1. **Grammar-Translation Method (19th century)**: Focused on translating texts and learning grammar rules.
2. **Direct Method (late 19th - early 20th century)**: Emphasized speaking and listening skills without translation.
3. **Audio-Lingual Method (1940s - 1960s)**: Used repetition and drills to teach language patterns.
4. **Communicative Language Teaching (1970s - present)**: Prioritizes communication and interaction in real-life contexts.
5. **Task-Based Language Teaching (1980s - present)**: Focuses on completing meaningful tasks using the target language.

These methods reflect the changing priorities and understandings of language learning over the years.

However, Teachers in the field of ELT tend overcome the favour towards one method rather than another each time and keep using different methods each time( eclectic) regardless if the method used is new or old . • What principles of Using a method ?

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers often adopt an eclectic approach, blending various methods to suit their students' needs. Here are some key principles to consider when using a method:

1. **Learner-Centeredness**: Focus on the needs, interests, and learning styles of the students. Adapt the method to ensure it engages and benefits them.
2. **Flexibility**: Be open to combining different methods and techniques. No single method is perfect for all situations, so flexibility allows for a more tailored approach.
3. **Contextual Relevance**: Consider the cultural, social, and educational context of the learners. Choose methods that are appropriate and effective in their specific environment.
4. **Clear Objectives**: Define clear learning objectives .

Principles for using methods : According to Harold Palme (1920), summarized the principles of language teaching methodology at that time as follows : 1-Initial preparation - orienting the students towards language learning 2-Habit-forming - establishing correct habits 3-Accuracy - avoiding inaccurate language

Harold Palmer's principles of language teaching methodology from 1920 are indeed insightful. Here's a summary of his key principles:

1. Initial Preparation: Orienting students towards language learning by creating a positive and motivating environment.
2. Habit-Forming: Establishing correct language habits through repetition and practice.
3. Accuracy: Ensuring students avoid inaccurate language use by focusing on precision and correctness.
4. 3-Gradation - each stage prepares the student for the next
5. 4-Proportion - each aspect of language given emphasis
6. 5-Concreteness - movement from the concrete to the abstract
7. 6-Interest - arousing the student's interest at all times
8. 7-Order of progression -hearing before speaking, and both before writing

These principles emphasize the importance of a structured and methodical approach to language teaching, which can still be relevant today.

Lecture 02 : Selection

Aim :By the end of this lecture , students will understand the main principles of vocabulary and grammar selection.

The field of selection in language teaching deals with the choice of appropriate units of the language for teaching purposes and with the development of techniques and procedures by which the language can be reduced to that which is most useful to the learner (Mackey 1965).

- What are the two basic components in CD ?


1- Vocabulary Selection :

Vocabulary is one of the most obvious components of language and one of the first things applied linguists turned their attention to .

• What words should be taught in a second language?

When teaching vocabulary in a second language, it's important to focus on words that will be most useful and relevant to the learners. Here are some key categories of words to consider:

1. **High-Frequency Words**: These are the most commonly used words in the language, such as "the," "is," "and," "you," "have," etc. Mastering these words helps learners understand and communicate basic ideas.
2. **Function Words**: Words that serve grammatical purposes, such as prepositions (in, on, at), conjunctions (and, but, or), and pronouns (he, she, they). These words are essential for constructing sentences.
3. **Content Words**: Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that carry meaning. Focus on words that are relevant to the learners' everyday lives, interests, and needs. For example, words related to family, work, hobbies, and common activities.
4. **Thematic Vocabulary**: Words related to specific themes or topics, such as food, travel, health, and technology. This helps learners build vocabulary around particular subjects and contexts.
5. **Academic Vocabulary**: For learners in academic settings, it's important to teach words that are commonly used in academic texts and discussions. This includes words related to subjects like science, history, and literature.
6. **Collocations and Phrases**: Teach common word combinations and phrases that native speakers use. For example, "make a decision," "take a break," "in the morning," etc. This helps learners sound more natural and fluent.
7. **Cultural Vocabulary**: Words and phrases that are specific to the culture of the language being learned. This includes idioms, slang, and expressions that are commonly used by native speakers.

By focusing on these categories, teachers can help learners build a strong and practical vocabulary foundation. If you have any more questions or need further clarification .

- **Important question:**

*Is selection something that should be left entirely to the intuitions of textbook writers and course planners or are there principles that can be used to produce a more objective and rational approach ?*

There are indeed principles that can help produce a more objective and rational approach to vocabulary selection in language teaching. Here are some key principles:

1. **Frequency**: Focus on high-frequency words that are commonly used in everyday language. These words are essential for basic communication and understanding.
2. **Range**: Choose words that have a wide range of uses and can be applied in various contexts. This ensures that learners can use the vocabulary in different situations.
3. **Relevance**: Select words that are relevant to the learners' needs, interests, and goals. This makes the vocabulary more meaningful and engaging for them.
4. **Learnability**: Consider the difficulty level of the words and the learners' proficiency. Start with simpler words and gradually introduce more complex vocabulary.
5. **Coverage**: Ensure that the selected words cover a broad range of topics and themes. This helps learners build a well-rounded vocabulary.
6. **Cultural Significance**: Include words that are culturally significant and relevant to the language being learned. This helps learners understand and appreciate the cultural context.
7. **Collocations**: Teach words that commonly occur together. This helps learners use vocabulary more naturally and fluently.

By following these principles, educators can create a more systematic and effective approach to vocabulary selection, ensuring that learners acquire the most useful and relevant words for their language development. If you have any more questions or need further clarification.

## 2- Early Corpus Collection

Some of the earliest approaches to vocabulary selection involved counting large collections of texts (Corpus) to determine the frequency with which words occurred, since it would seem obvious that words of highest frequency should be taught first.

The earliest frequency counts undertaken for language teaching were based on analysis of popular reading materials and resulted in a *word frequency list* (This was in the days

before tape recorders made possible the analysis of words used in the spoken language and before computers could be used to analyze the words used in printed sources.)

It was discovered that a small class of words (around 3,000) accounted for up to 85 percent of the words used in everyday texts. However, recognizing 85 percent of the words in a text is not the same as understanding 85 percent of the text

Janssen –van Dieten point out : • ‘ Text comprehension is not just a function of the proportion of familiar words , but depends on a number of other factors as well, such as the subject matter of the text , the way in which the writer approaches the subject , and the extent to which the reader is familiar with the subject.’

• Is frequency the most important criteria?

It was soon realized, however, that frequency were not sufficient as a basis for developing word lists. because words with high frequency in written texts are not necessarily the most teachable words in an introductory language course .

- Words such as *book, pen, desk, dictionary,* for example, are not frequent words yet might be needed early on in a language course. Other criteria were therefore also used in determining word lists.

3- Grammar Selection and Gradation

- The need for a systematic approach to selecting grammar for teaching purposes was also a priority for applied linguists from the 1920s.

- The number of syntactic structures in a language is large, as is seen from the contents of any grammar book. (Fries 1952; Homby 1954; Alexander, Allen, Close, and O'Neill 1975).

- The need for grammatical selection is seen in the following examples from Wilkins (1976, 59), which are some of the structures that can be used for the speech act of "asking permission."

- Can/may I use your telephone, please? Please let me use your telephone.
- Is it all right to use your telephone?
- If it's all right with you, I'll use your telephone. Am I allowed to use your telephone?
- Do you mind if I use your telephone? Do you mind me using your telephone?
- Would you mind if! used your telephone?
- You don't mind if! use your telephone (do you)?
- I wonder if you have any objection to me using your telephone? Would you *permit* me to use your telephone?
- Would you be so kind as to allow me to use your telephone? Would it be possible for me to use your telephone?
- Do you think you could let me use your telephone?

- How can one determine which of these structures would be useful to teach? 'Triditionally the-grammar items included in a course were determined by the teaching method in use

- The majority of courses started with finites of *be* ,and statements of identification ('This is a pen ect.).
- However, courses that gave importance to the reading skill presented the Past simple ( essential for narrative) early.
- Those who claimed to use the Direct Method ( the use of the target language , no mother tongue , the use body language and demonstration) presented the Progressive (or Continuous) Tense first and postponed the Simple tenses. (Homby.1959)

- The grammatical material must be graded. Certain moods and tenses are more useful than others.
- In a language possessing a number of cases, we will not learn off the whole set of prepositions, their uses and requirements, but we will select them in accordance with their degree of importance.

## PRINCIPLES OF GRAMMAR SELECTION

Two main criteria : Simplicity and Learnability
• However, there are other principles

**1-Simplicity and Centrality :** • This recommends choosing structures that are simple and more central to the basic structure of the language than those that are complex and peripheral .

• By this criteria , the following would occur in an introductory –level English course :1

The train arrived. (Subject Verb)
She is a journalist. (Subject Verb Complement)
The children are in the bedroom. (Subject Verb Adverb)
We ate the fruit. (Subject Verb Object)
I put the book in the bag. (Subject Verb Object Adverb)

- The following would be excluded by the same criteria:
- Having neither money nor time, we decided buying a ticket to the opera was out of the question.
- For her to speak to us like that was something we had never anticipated.

- Frequency: Frequency of occurrence has also been proposed in developing grammatical syllabuses.

- However , this faced certain difficulties .MC carthy and Carter ( 1995) , for example ,reported that data taken from a corpus of conversational language and identify a number of features of spoken grammar , not typically included in standard teaching syllabuses.

- For Example :

- Subject and verb ellipsis, such as "Don't know" instead of "I don't know."

- Topic highlighting, such as "That house on the corner, is that where you live?“

- Tails, such as the following phrases at the end of sentences: "you know,""don't they?”

- Reporting verbs, such as "I was saying," "They we_r;, telling me."

**. 2 -Leamability:** It has sometimes been argued that grammatical syllabuses should take account the order in which grammatical items are acquired in second language learning. For example, Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974) proposed the following order of development of grammatical items, based on data elicited during interviews with second language learners at different proficiency levels :

- **1 nouns**
- **2 verbs**
- **3 adjectives**
- **4 verb *be***
- **5 possessive pronouns**
- **6 personal pronouns**
- **7 adverbs of time**
- **8 requests**
- **9 simple present**

- **1 1 wH-questions**
- **12 present continuous**
- **13 directions**
- **14 possessive adjectives**
- **15 comparatives**
- **16 offers**
- **17 simple future**
- **18 simple past**

- Although the validity of this acquisition sequence has been questioned (e.g., Nimaid992, 138), the need to sequence course content in a systematic way has been by no means something unavoidable.
- The seventeenth-century scholar Comenius (sum marized by Mackey 1965, 205) argued:

The beginning should be slow and accurate , rightly understood and immediately .Unless the first layer , nothing should be built on it , for the whole structure is developed from the foundations . All parts should be bound together so that one flows out of the other , and later units include earlier ones .Whatever precedes a step to what follows and the last step should be traceable to the first by clear chain of connection'

The following approaches to gradation are possible:

Linguistic distance: Lado (1957) proposed that structures that are similar to those in the native language should be taught first. "Those elements that are similar to (the learner's] native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult" (Lado 1957, 2). This assumption underlay the approach to language comparison known as contrastive analysis.

Intrinsic difficulty: This principle argues that simple structures should be taught before complex ones and is the commonest criterion used to justify the sequence of grammatical items in a syllabus.

Communicative need: Some structures will be needed early on and cannot be postponed despite their difficulty, such as the simple past in English, since it is difficult to avoid making reference to past events for very long in a course.

Frequency: The frequency of occurrence of structures and grammatical items in the language may also affect the order in which they appear in a syllabus, although as we

noted, little information of this sort is available to syllabus planners. Frequency may also compete with other criteria. The present continuous is not one of the most frequent verb forms in English, yet it is often introduced early in a language course because it is relatively easy to demonstrate and practice in a classroom context.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEWING

1- What is the difference between course design and curriculum development ?

2- • 2-List three main criteria for vocabulary selection in curriculum development .

3- • 3-List three main criteria for grammar selection.

4- • 4-List Three principles of methods implementation .

5- • 5-In what ways do methods raise issues related to curriculum development.

## Lecture Three : FROM SYLLABUS DESIGN TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

**AIM :**BY THE STUDENTS WILL UNDERSTAND THE MAIN FRAMEWORK OF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Overall, the course aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the principles and practices involved in syllabus design and curriculum development, preparing students to create effective and engaging educational programs2.

Beside grammatical and vocabulary syllbuses , •

Other approaches to language teaching were also available at this time,such as travel and commercial English books that were organized around topics, situations, and phrases as well as some that focused on technical English or the English used in specific occupations(ESP).

**I-The Quest for New Methods**

The teaching of English as second or foreign language became an increasingly important activity after World War Il .Immigrants, refugees, and foreign students generated a huge demand for English courses in the United kingdom,Canada,the United States,and Australia.

The role of English as a language of international communication had expanded rapidly by the 1950s.There was much greater mobility of peoples as a result of growth in air travel and international tourism.English was increasingly important in international trade and commerce.The role of English was supported by the growth of radio,film, and television.White (1988, 9)

Whereas in medieval times English was the language of an island nation and French was the language of a continental one, in the twentieth century English has become the language of the world thanks to the linguistic legacy of the British Empire, the emergence of the USA as an English-speaking superpower and the fortuitous association of English with the industrial and technological developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

All of these developments supported the need for a practical command of English for people in many parts of the world rather than an academic mastery of the language as one might acquire in a typical school course.

## II- INNOVATIONS IN METHODOLOGY

The initial response of the English-language teaching profession was to explore new directions in methodology.It was assumed that in order to meet the changing needs of language learners, more up-to-date teaching methods were needed that reflected the latest understandings of the nature of language and of language learning.Linguistics was a source of theories about the organization and structure of language and these were eagerly applied in the cause of new "scientifically based“ teaching methods.

The1950s and 1960s in language teaching were hence times of methodological excitement. In Britain, applied linguists developed a methodology that drew on the oral approach that

had been developed in the twenties and thirties linked to a carefully graded grammatical and lexical syllabus. The methodology had the following characteristics:

A structural syllabus with graded vocabulary levels Meaningful presentation of structures in contexts through the use of situations to contextualize new teaching points A sequence of classroom activities that went from Presentation ,to controlled practice,to freer Production( the PPP method)

This became known as the situational approach or the structural-situational approach or Situational Language Teaching and was the main stream teaching method in British language teaching circles from the 1950s. A well-known course-book series based on this method is Robert O'Neill‘ sKernel series(Longman1978). In countries and territories such as Singapore,under colonial administration.,the curriculum of English medium schools in the early 1950s followed the tradition of English teaching in British schools, with the integration of language and literature"(Ho 1994,222). The same applied in other colonies such as Malaysia,India, and Hong Kong..

Later this was replaced by a "TESL/TEFL" approach based on a structural syllabus and a situational drill-based methodology.The structural-situational approach was also used in Australia as the basis for English teaching programs for immigrants from the1950s (Ozolins1993).

In the United States in the1960s. Language teaching was also under the sway of a powerful method.:. The Audiolingual Method. Stem (1974, 63) describes the period from 1958 to 1964asthe"Golden Age of Audiolinguatism."This drew on the work of American structural linguistics. which provided the basis for a grammatical syllabus and a teaching approach that drew heavily on the theory of behaviorism.

Language learning was thought to depend on habits that could be established by repetition. Teaching techniques made use of repetition of dialogues and pattern practice as a basis for automatization.followed by exercises hat involved transferring learned patterns to new situations.

Rivers (1964) stated the assumptions of audiolingualism as: Habits are strengthened by reinforcement. Foreign language habit s are formed most effectively by giving the right response,not by making mistakes. Language is behavior and behavior can be learned only by inducing the student to behave.

similar method was developed in Europe and became known later on as the Audiovisiual Method because of its use of visual means for presenting and practising new language items ( Lado 1978). Although it seems with huge benefits .. Yet , the methods has certain disadvantages.

A-Basic method of teaching is repetition and mechanical drills .

b. Audio-Visual materials were open to same sort of misuse.

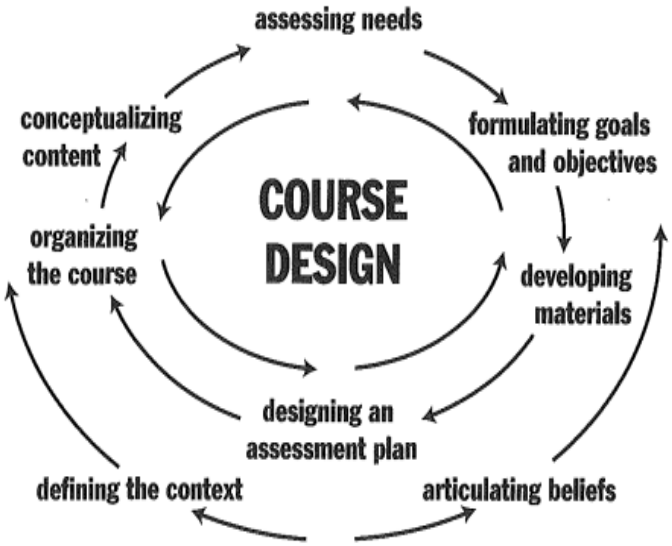
c. Audio Visual method doesn't develop writing and reading skill.

d. New materials necessitated extensive use of equipment with all associated problems of black-out, extension leads, carrying tape-recorders from classroom to classroom.

The fascination with methods and the quest for the best method remained a preoccupation of language teaching for the next 20 years.

**III- A Sytems Approach to Course Design**

Designing a language course has several components. Classic models of curriculum design as well as more recent models agree on most of the components, although they may subdivide some of them and give them slightly different names. These components comprise setting objectives based on some form of assessment; determining content, materials, and method; and evaluation.




**A Framework of Course Development Processes**

As a course designer, you can begin anywhere in the framework, as long as it makes sense to you to begin where you do. What makes sense to you will depend on your beliefs and understandings, articulated or not, and the reality of the context and what you know about your students. For that reason, articulating beliefs and defining one's context are on the bottom of the chart to serve as the foundation for the other processes.

Deciding where to begin will depend on how you problematize your situation, that is, how you determine the challenges that you can most productively address within the context. This view of the role of the teacher as course designer is captured in Zeichner and Liston's list of features that characterize reflective teaching. They write that a reflective teacher:

- ✓ examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
- ✓ is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching;
- ✓ is attentive to institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
- ✓ takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; and
- ✓ takes responsibility for his or her own professional development.

*(Zeichner and Liston 1996 p. 6)*

When you design a course, examining, framing, and attempting to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice become examining, framing, and attempting to address the challenges of course design. Assumptions and values, which in this book I call beliefs, are a crucial influence on the way you understand the challenges. Deciding which challenges you can productively address depends on attention to and understanding of institutional and cultural contexts. These three characteristics will all help to determine where you choose to begin the course-design process, which is essentially a reflective and responsive process of understanding your options, making choices, and taking responsibility for those choices.

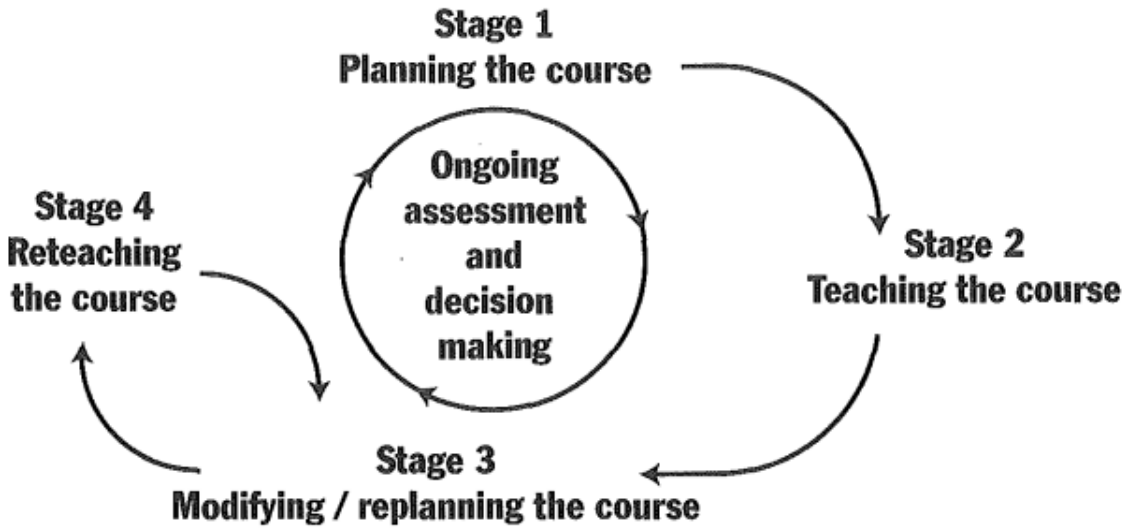
The second aspect captured by the flow chart is to portray a "systems" approach to course design. The reason you can begin anywhere in the framework is because course development-designing a course and teaching it-comprises a system, the way a forest or the human body is a system (Clark 1997). This means that the components are interrelated and each of the processes influences and is influenced by the other in some way. For example, if you begin with formulating goals and objectives, you will need to think about the content you are teaching. If you begin with designing an assessment plan, you will need to think about the objectives you are trying to reach and assess. If you begin with developing materials, you will need to think about what you are trying to teach and for what purpose.

Course design is a system in the sense that planning for one component will contribute to others; changes to one component will influence all the others. If you are clear and articulate about content, it will be easier to write objectives. If you change the content, the objectives will need to change to reflect the changes to the content, as will the materials and the assessment plan. If you are clear about your plan for assessing student

learning, it will help you design appropriate materials. If you change your approach to assessment, it will have an impact on the content, the objectives, and so on.

**IV- From Conceptualization to Practice**

The plan or Course designdesign of theiscourse part of is the not complete the course, but a part of course development .Course design is part of the complete cycle of course development.




**The Cycle of Course Development**

The cycle of course development typically involves several key stages.

1. **Needs Analysis**: This initial stage involves identifying the needs and goals of the learners. It includes gathering information about the learners' backgrounds, language proficiency levels, and specific learning objectives.
2. **Course Design**: Based on the needs analysis, the course is designed. This includes defining the course objectives, selecting the content, and determining the teaching methods and assessment strategies.

3. **Material Development**: In this stage, instructional materials and resources are created or selected. These materials should align with the course objectives and be suitable for the learners' needs.
4. **Implementation**: The course is then implemented, with teachers delivering the content and facilitating learning activities. This stage involves classroom instruction, practice, and interaction.
5. **Assessment and Evaluation**: Throughout the course, learners' progress is assessed through various methods, such as tests, quizzes, assignments, and observations. The effectiveness of the course is also evaluated to identify areas for improvement.
6. **Revision and Improvement**: Based on the assessment and evaluation results, the course is revised and improved. This may involve updating the content, adjusting the teaching methods, or modifying the assessment strategies.

**Practice**

Identify one or two colleagues to work with as you design your course. It is generally preferable to work with someone who is designing a similar course or working in a similar context and so is familiar with the issues you are facing. However, working with someone who is unfamiliar with your context can also be helpful because you will need to be more explicit about what you are doing and your reasons for doing so.

***Suggested Readings***

"The Design Solution: Systems Thinking," the second chapter in Edwin Clark's book *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A StudentCentered Approach* (1997), was influential in helping me understand course design as a system. For another view of an interactive approach to course design, see Alvino Fantini's gemstone model, described in "At the Heart of Things: CISV's Educational Purpose" in *Interspectives: A Journal on Transcultural and Educational Perspectives*, Vol. 13, CISV (Children's International Summer Villages) International, Newcastle, England, 1995.

**Lecture Four : Defining The Context**

Aim : helps align the course with the overall educational goals and objectives.

The context is a key factor in answering questions like the one above. For this reason, it is important to define what you know about the context in order to know how to answer the question. The same is true for designing a course. You need to know as much as possible about the context in order to make decisions about the course. The two teachers below illustrate how different the contexts of teaching English as a second or foreign language can be.

The first teacher, Patricia Naccarato, describes the program in which she taught for two summers.

**Patricia Naccarato**

The context is a private language school with branches in Florida, California, and suburban Virginia, outside of Washington D.C. They recruit international students who come to the United States for a summer of English study and cultural exchange. The students range in age from 12 to 18 years and, while in the country, stay in a homestay situation with a local family. The components of the program are writing, grammar and conversation. This is the second summer I have taught the writing component of the program, at the Virginia site. There is no set curriculum and it is left up to the teacher to select what they will include, although a book is prbvided. Quite honestly, the people running the school don't seem the least bit concerned about what I will be doing with the students. They have assigned a book and are happy to have found a "real" teacher to teach at least one element of the course.

**Michael Gatto**

The second teacher, Michael Gatto, describes the context for his teaching practicum at a language institute in El Salvador.

Mrs. B., the director, welcomed us and informed me that I would not be allowed to enter the building again without a tie. She then plopped three books down in front of me and said in a very serious tone of voice, "You start teaching tomorrow morning at 8:00. You will be teaching twenty-three students in the beginning level. You have one month to finish Units 1, 2, and 3. Don't deviate from this book. I know that students from [your MA

program] like to try their own things. Don't. We have a method that works for us, so please follow it. Wear a tie and get a hair cut. See you tomorrow morning. Don't be late."

These two teachers' brief accounts illustrate not only two kinds of contexts, but two kinds of responsibilities with respect to designing a course. Patricia has complete freedom to design her course, which provides its own set of challenges in that she will have to make all the decisions relating to content and goals, organization, materials, and assessment. Michael, on the other hand, is expected to follow a prescribed text and methods, another type of challenge in that he will need to consider how to adapt the text to meet the needs of his students. In order to meet their respective challenges, each teacher needs to understand the context so as to work successfully within it. This chapter will address the following questions, *What is meant by "context"?* and *Why is it important to define one's context?*

## I- What is Meant by Context?

Imagine that you are an architect and you have been commissioned to design a house. Where do you start? Do you start by sketching some designs of houses on paper? My father-in-law and brother-in-law are both architects. Having watched them design and oversee the building of houses over the years, I know that if you have to design a house you don't begin with sketches, because you have no basis for the design. You begin with specifications. For example, where is the site, how big is it, what are its particular features? How many people will live in this house? What are their interests or needs that will affect how they use the house, the kinds of rooms, and how the rooms relate to each other? What is the budget? What is the time line? What materials are available locally? And so on. Designing a course is similar to designing a house. You need to have a lot of information in order to design a structure that will fit the context. The first investigation in this chapter is designed to begin the process of outlining the kinds of information necessary to define the context of a course.

| *People* | *Physical setting* |
|---|---|
| students | location of school: convenience, |
| how many, age, gender, culture(s), | setting |
| other language(s), purpose(s), | classroom: size, furniture |
| education, profession, experience, | light, noise |
| other stakeholders | always same classroom? |
| school administrators | |
| parents | |
| funders | |
| community | |

| *Nature of course and institution* | *Teaching Resources* |
|---|---|
| type/purpose of course | materials available |
| mandatory, open enrollment | required text? |
| relation to current/previous courses | develop own materials? |
| prescribed curriculum or not | equipment: cassettes, |
| required tests or not | video, photocopying |
| | clerical support |

| *Time* |
|---|
| how many hours total over what span of time |
| how often class meets |
| for how long each time |
| day of week, time of day |
| where fits in schedule of students |
| students' timeliness |

**Factors to Consider in Defining the Context**

## II- WHY Is IT IMPORTANT TO DEFINE ONE'S CONTEXT?

Defining one's context is crucial for several reasons:

1. **Relevance**: It ensures that the content and activities are relevant to the learners' needs, interests, and real-life situations. This makes the learning experience more meaningful and engaging.

2. **Alignment with Goals**: Context helps align the course with the overall educational goals and objectives. It ensures that the course contributes to the broader curriculum and meets the desired learning outcomes.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity**: Understanding the context allows for the incorporation of cultural elements that are important to the learners. This fosters a more inclusive and respectful learning environment.
4. **Practical Application**: Contextualizing the content helps learners see the practical application of what they are learning. This enhances their ability to transfer knowledge and skills to real-world situations.
5. **Motivation**: When learners see the relevance and applicability of the content to their own lives, they are more motivated to engage and participate actively in the learning process.

The more information you have about your context the more able you will be to make decisions and to plan an effective course. It doesn't mean that decisions will necessarily be easier to make! Returning to the architect analogy, if an architect designs a house that is too big for the site or beyond the budget of the clients or with material that is not available, the house will not get built. If you design a course that covers too much material for the time given, or is built around topics that are inappropriate for your students, or depends on materials that are not readily available to the students, the course will be ineffective or, at best, require ongoing repair. Unlike architects, teachers can, to some extent, make the changes in the blueprint as they carry out the course.

Defining one's context can also be viewed as part of pre-course needs assessment. Information about the students and about the curriculum is clearly related to students' learning needs. Other information, such as time and setting, does not necessarily help define students' language learning needs, but has to be taken into account in order to design a course that can focus on the needs within the givens of the context. It is similar to what J. D. Brown calls "situational needs analysis," which pertains to information about a program's "human aspects, that is, the physical, social and psychological contexts in which learning takes place" and is related to "administrative, financial, logistical, manpower,

pedagogic, religious, cultural, personal, or other factors that might have an impact on the program." (1995, p. 40) In Ali Pahlavanlu's case, students' learning needs were not directly shaped by the investors, license holders, and government officials. They were shaped to some extent by parents' demands that the course help their children pass the Concours and by the religious concerns of Iranian society. Reconciling competing demands, while difficult, is made easier when you know what they are.

III- **Problematizing**

Defining your context is an important step in problematizing your course. The term **problematizing** comes from Paulo Freire (1973 ). It means looking at something that is taken for granted-literacy, for example-and taking it apart to understand it, challenge it, and act on it. I use problematizing to mean looking at what you know about the context and defining the challenges you feel you need to and are able to meet in order to make the course successful. These challenges may involve class size, multi-levels, number of hours, lack of resources, your own lack of experience with the content of the course, and so on.

Problematizing is rooted in the assumption that the teacher who teaches the course is the best equipped to understand its challenges and to mobilize the resources available to meet those challenges. It is also based on my belief that there is not one way or "best way" to design a course. Rather, the course must

work within the givens of the context and make use of the skills that the teacher brings to the course. For example, Lu Yuan, a teacher who taught Chinese to university exchange students in an immersion program in China, grappled with how to design her course so that she could make use of the world outside of the classroom as an integral part of the course. This became a key challenge that influenced her design of materials and course organization. Whenever her students learned an aspect of grammar, a function, or vocabulary items, they were given a task that required them to use the new aspect of language outside of class and then report back to class on what they encountered and what they learned. In designing his history of American literature course for high school students, David Markus at first followed the kind of syllabus the high school used: a chronological survey of American literature. He wasn't satisfied with this approach. When he problematized his situation he realized that his challenge was how to provide enough

time and depth in the course for students to really understand the literature, while still covering a broad spectrum of the literature. Defining the challenge helped him to produce a solution: a syllabus based on themes in the literature.

Problematizing helps you decide where to start and what to focus on in planning the course. The more information you have about the context, the more apparent the challenges will be, and the better you will be able to define and address the challenges as you design and teach the course. Problematizing is about making choices for action. A given course can be designed and taught in any number of ways. You need to make decisions about how you will design the course, based on what you know about your context.

To return to the analogy with designing a house, if the site for the house has particular problems associated with it, such as poor drainage, they must be accounted for in the design or there will be continual problems with the house. On the other hand, if there are particularly spectacular features of the site, such as a beautiful view, it makes sense to take advantage of them. By defining your context and the challenges it presents, you put yourself in a position to take advantage of the resources of the context and your own internal resources of common sense and creativity.

**Lecture Five : Articulating Beliefs**

**Aim :** help students define the direction and focus of the course and ensures that all aspects of the course are aligned with your educational philosophy.

Articulating beliefs involves clearly expressing your fundamental principles and values about teaching and learning.

**Warming UP**

*Think of a language lesson you observed, took part in, or taught, that you thought was an excellent lesson. Imagine that after the lesson you run into a colleague who asks you "How was the lesson?" You respond that it was a great lesson. The colleague says, "Oh, really? What made it so great?" Explain in as much detail as possible why you thought it was a good lesson.*

The way you answer the question in this Investigation is a means of getting at what you feel is important in teaching and learning a language. What you feel is important is based on your understandings of how people learn languages and the beliefs you hold about language teaching that stem from those understandings. For example, let's suppose the lesson took place in a class for adult learners. The learners were comparing different letters to the editor taken from the local newspaper. The letters were written in support of (or against} candidates **in** forthcoming elections. The students were working in small groups to figure out how the candidates differed. I might say that one thing that made the class great was that students had an opportunity to do a problem-solving activity in small groups that required the use of the target language. Answering the question *"Why did that make the lesson 'great'?"* would help me to uncover some of my beliefs about learners' and teachers' roles in the classroom and how language is learned. I might say that problem solving as a way of learning requires learners to negotiate with each othet; which stands in contrast to a way of learning in which learners receive knowledge from the teacher which they then memorize or internalize. When problem solving in the target language, learners are required to use the language they know and adapt it to the communication needs of the situation. When working in small groups, learners are usually more likely to participate because they feel less "on the spot" than in a large group and because there are fewer people. Responses such as these can help me arrive at what I feel is important, what I believe, about how people learn language.

One framework in his books for sorting *Fundamental* out your*Concepts* beliefs is *of* Stern's *Language* framework, *Teaching* which (1983) he outlines ne framework in his books for sorting *Fundamental* out your*Concepts* beliefs is *of* Stern's *Language* framework, *Teaching* which (1983) he and *Issues and Options in Language Teaching* (1992). He proposes that any theory of language teaching needs to address the concepts of languag~, society (or social context}, learning, and teaching.

> "... there are four concepts which are treated as fundamental, and not simply one. Time and time again language teaching has fallen into the trap of making a single belief, concept, or principle paramount, with a resulting loss of perspective." (1992, p. 23)

**Practice :**

*Look over the following framework and note what you think each category means. Then make a list of possible examples to illustrate each category.*

**Figure 3.1a: A Framework for Articulating Your Beliefs**

1. Your view of language
2. Your view of the social context of language
3. Your view of learning and learners
4. Your view of teaching

## I- BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE

Your view of what language is or what being proficient in a language means affects what you teach and how you teach it. Language has been defined in many ways, for example as pronunciation, grammar, lexis, discourse (Bailey 1998), or as form, meaning and use

(Larsen-Freeman 1990). Models of communicative competence which include grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences have outlined what it means to be proficient in a language (Canale and Swain 1980; Omaggio Hadley 1993.)

Your beliefs about which view of language should be emphasized will translate into beliefs about how the language should be learned. An emphasis on language as rule-governed may translate into the belief that learning a language means learning to use it accurately, with no grammatical errors. To return to the example of a class of adult learners, a good lesson might have students analyze the grammatical errors in letters *they* had written to the editor and then correct the errors. An emphasis on language as meaning-based may be manifest in the belief that language in the classroom should be relevant and meaningful to the students in the class. A good lesson might have the students write a letter about issues that affect them. An emphasis on language as socially constructed among people in discourse communities may be manifest in the belief that learning a language requires an awareness of how language is used within a given community such as the classroom or neighborhood. A good lesson might have students compare two sample letters to the editor and determine which social factors accounted for the difference. It is possible to imagine the three lesson scenarios above taking place with the same group of learners, and, in fact, you may hold all three beliefs.

## II- BELIEFS ABOUT THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE

In Stern's view, society, which he also refers to as "social context," encompasses sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical issues in language teaching. Sociolinguistic issues bridge language and social context in that they are concerned with how language is adapted to fit (or not) the social context. A nonnative English speaking graduate student once began a letter to one of her professors to request a recommendation with *"I need a letter of recommendation for_. Please write me a recommendation and send it to* . .. "Grammatically and lexically, the request was accurate; however it was not appropriate for the purpose or for her relation to the receiver of the request. An emphasis on the sociolinguistic aspect-that language cannot be separated from the context in which it is used-may translate into the belief that learning a language means learning how to

adjust it to contextual factors such as roles and purpose. A good lesson might have students examine different ways to begin and end letters depending on the purpose for the letter and the person to whom it was being sent.

Sociocultural issues are concerned with the interaction between language and culture. They include different dimensions of culture such as social values (e.g., gender differences) attitudes (e.g., toward roles of men and women) norms (e.g., ways of greeting, eating), customs (e.g., marriage customs), and "products" (e.g., literature, art). A belief related to sociocultural issues would be that language learning involves understanding both one's own culture and that of the target language because attitudes one holds may be different or even in conflict with those held by some users of the target language. A good lesson might have students discuss the cultural values implicit in sending letters to the editor, and their own comfort level with doing so.

Sociopolitical issues are concerned with how a given language or social group (ethnic, gender, etc.) is viewed by other social groups, access to language and services, and a critical awareness of how language is used. The beliefs that learners need to know how to participate in the community and that language teaching involves helping learners gain access to social systems are both related to sociopolitical issues. A good lesson that stems from these beliefs might have students write a letter to the editor about an issue that affects them, in which they outline action that can be taken to address the issue. The belief that language learning involves analyzing the way in which language is used to gain, hold, and deny power could be manifest in a lesson in which students analyze the point of view of a newspaper story about a topic that affects them and decide how to respond.

## III- BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING

Beliefs about teaching and the role of the teacher are connected to beliefs about learning, although this is an area in which what a teacher does is sometimes in contradiction to what he believes, or professes to believe. The process of teaching can be viewed on a continuum in which at one end the teacher transmits knowledge to the students, and at the other end the teacher and students negotiate the knowledge and skills and methods of learning. On the one end the teacher makes decisions about knowledge and skills to be learned, tells the students what to learn, or provides models or examples and expects or helps students to

internalize them. As we move up the continuum, the process is viewed as providing problem-solving activities and actively helping students to negotiate them; learning may be viewed as a process of shared decision making with the students. Still further along the continuum, students determine the problems to be solved and use the teacher as a language and culture resource.

Some questions about teaching and the role of the teacher might be: Is the teacher the expert? Is the role of the teacher to provide answers or is it to provide structures for finding answers? Does the teacher make all the decisions or does she negotiate decisions with the learners? Is the teacher a collaborator in students' learning? Is the teacher a learner? If you hold the belief that the teacher should negotiate decisions with the learners because learning involves responsibility, then a good lesson might have the learners decide how to respond to an issue they had identified.

**Practice**

*you used the framework in Figure 3.1a to organize and write down your own ideas. Compare your ideas with those in the framework in Figure 3.1 b below. Discuss the differences and similarities with a partner. Which areas overlap? What would you add to the framework below? To your own framework?*

**Figure 3.1b: A Framework for Articulating Your Beliefs**

1. Your view of language

   *For example, language is rule governed, meaning-based, a means of self-expression, a means of learning about oneself and the world, a means of getting things done.*

2. Your view of the social context of language

   *For example, the social context of language includes sociolinguistic issues such as adapting language to fit the context, sociocultural issues such as cultural values and customs which may be in harmony or in conflict with those of the learners' own culture, and sociopolitical issues such as access to work and education.*

3. Your view of learning and learners

   *For example, learning is a deductive or inductive process; learning occurs in community or individually; learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills; learning is the development of metacognitive and critical thinking skills.*

   *Learners have affective, cognitive and social needs; learners receive knowledge or construct knowledge; learners follow directions or direct their own learning.*

4. Your view of teaching

   *For example, teaching is knowledge transmission, management of learning, providing of learning structures, a collaborative process.*

   *The teacher is a decision maker, knowledge transmitter, provider of learning structures, collaborator, resource.*

**Practice 2**

*you made a list ofwhat made a particular lesson great. Look through your list and categorize your responses according to whether they involve a view oflanguage, ofthe social context oflanguage, oflearners and learning, or of teaching. Is one category more prominent than another?*

## AN EXAMPLE OF A TEACHER'S BELIEFS

Denise Lawson is a teacher who designed an advanced writing course for a university extension program in the United States. Three factors influenced her beliefs: her

experience as a learner, her experience as a teacher and how the students responded to her and each other, and understandings from readings. Certain authors and readings as well as a presentation on the significance of sociocultural issues in writing in a second language were particularly influential in helping her understand what she felt was important. The following are her teaching beliefs and what each of them mean for her teaching and for the course:

*Learner-centered curriculum*

Development of a community of learners who support each other's learning process; emphasis on cooperation in place of competition; student participation in course content, process, and assessment; use of feedback as a means of course evaluation

*Meaning-centered curriculum*

Development of course content relevant to students' needs and interests; incorporation of sociocultural issues of second language learning

*Process-centered curriculum*

Use of five step process writing model; use of self-assessment as well as assessment by peers and teacher; final assessment based on progress, participation, and performance

*Clear articulation of roles of teacher and students*

- Students as managers of their own learning (via learner strategy training), and as resources for their peers
- Teacher as curriculum designer and articulator of goals and objectives, enthusiast, resource, coordinator of class activities, participant in assessment process, and co-learner

**Practice 3**

*Which of the four categories, language, social context, learning, teaching are addressed in Denise Lawson's beliefs? How? If you were designing a writing course, would you change the list or add to it? What does this tell you about your beliefs?*

**Practice 4**

*Brainstorm an initial list of your beliefs that you feel are relevant to the course you are designing. You can write them as they occur to you or you can list them according to the categories in Figure 3.1 or you can use the triangle in Figure 3.2. At this point you do not need to worry about having too many or too few. The point of the investigation is to begin to articulate relevant beliefs. They will be refined later.*

## IV-How Do BELIEFS AFFECT THE ACTUAL DESIGNING OF A COURSE?

Your beliefs play a role at each stage of course design. They may not always be present in your thinking, but they underlie the decisions you make. David Markus designed a history of American literature course for high school students studying English in the United States. He writes about the way his beliefs influenced the course.

As I approached the course development process I had certain beliefs that helped me decide what was important to focus on. These personal values were not always in the forefront of my thinking, but at certain places in the project, I would return to them to assess how my course design incorporated these principles. If I found that I had strayed, I would revise the plan so it coincided with those principles.

David returns to his beliefs at a later point in the process, as a way to help him organize the content of the course.

After deciding on goals and objectives for the course, I was ready to decide on a syllabus and some principles for course organization. It was at this point that I reminded myself that my original goal was to create a course that was based on certain educational beliefs I held. In the first few stages of curricular development, I had paid very little conscious attention to these principles since my first instinct was to get a firm grip on *what* I was going to teach and then move to the *how.* Over the years, I have come to believe in a few principles of education that I try to incorporate into any class I teach.

The first precept comes from *Smart Schools* by David Perkins. He talks about the need to trade coverage for a focus on understanding and active use of knowledge. (1995, p. 164) In the past, St. An/drew's English department has tried to cover the history of American literature in 4 months in chronological fashion. The students feel that they are moving on a train that begins in the Colonial Period and ends in the Present day, but they only get a glimpse of the landscape whizzing by them. There is little time to apply lessons learned in one section to what they are going to encounter in a future section. For this course to live up to my standard of depth and active application of knowledge, I knew I would have to cut something out of the curriculum.

A change from a chronological syllabus to a thematic syllabus seemed to be the solution. This would make the connections from different time frames more explicit, but also give the students the opportunity to make some of the connections themselves. When I inquired whether I would be able to teach the course in this fashion, the English department chair gave lukewarm support for the idea. She agreed that the old syllabus skimmed over the content, but also expressed concern that the students would not be able to put the literature in historic context. I assured her that the class would consistently keep the historic context in mind through a timeline that they would be responsible for updating throughout the term as we read new authors.

A second key educational precept that I wanted to include in the design was the idea of student choice. The complaint in the past was that students did not seem interested in the books that were taught. I believed if students had a choice of materials (with some structure provided by the teacher) they would choose good literature that would be interesting for them. Just the investment that is inherent in choice would suggest this, but I believed that they would also choose themes that have personal significance for them. This principle of student choice can even be applied to organization of the course and classroom rituals.
From this belief in choice, I decided that the students would not only get to choose some of the readings in a theme, they would get to choose two of the three themes. This would help individualize instruction and to a certain extent allow us to deal with the coverage issue through the back door of literature response groups, where students discuss different

readings. (This also prevents students who may have had different exposure to American literature from being made to read a book or story for a second time.)

Hand in hand with the belief in student choice is a belief that the teacher needs to provide support and structure within which students work and learn. This idea derives from Stevick's concept of the balance between control and initiative (Stevick 1998, p. 31-35.) All students can feel safer in an environment where they know the rules and know what to expect. Having an organization keyed to the weekly or daily schedule provides them with advanced organizers that help LEP (limited English proficiency) students focus mainly on the language. The use of daily and weekly rituals also saves time in transitions. This is important since Saphier and Gower (1987) estimate that up to 25% of class time can be wasted each day in transitions. Based on these assumptions I decided to have certain constant ritual-like activities as a part of this course.

David Markus has articulated beliefs about the teacher's role, about student choice, and about learning, which he views as the understanding and active use of knowledge. Each of these beliefs has helped him make key decisions about the content and organization of his course. Earlier in this chapter, Denise Lawson articulated four main beliefs that guided her planning of an advanced composition course: her belief in a learner-centered curriculum, a meaning-centered curriculum, a process-centered curriculum and her belief that the roles of teachers and learners should be clearly articulated. She then explained what each belief meant. Both of these teachers have articulated rich and powerful beliefs that had important implications for how each designed his or her course. They both "boiled" their beliefs down to a few essential ones that they felt were key to their particular courses. They may have had other beliefs, but chose to focus on only a few that they considered essential. These became their core beliefs or principles.

Articulating a belief requires clarity about the experience from which it is drawn, and about the knowledge base that provides the language in which to express it. It is not always easy to identify these beliefs. Iris Broudy, a teacher whose voice we first heard in Chapter

1, expresses the challenge of identifying her beliefs this way: "I find myself struggling to sort out what I really believe about my course from what seems like a good idea (based on theory, examples from books, etc.)." There are a lot of good ideas to draw from, and it is important to be clear about their relevance to those core beliefs that will guide you in your particular context.

An image that captures what is meant by a core belief or principle is one provided by a former president of my university in a welcoming speech to our students. He talked about burning wood in a campfire and how the last and brightest to burn were the nodes in which the sap had gathered, sap from all parts of the tree. Identifying the core principles for a given course is akin to finding the nodes with the sap in them. A core belief or principle will carry within it elements of other beliefs you hold. Don't overwhelm yourself with too many beliefs, but look to the ones that you feel essential. Your essential beliefs are the nodes where the sap has gathered.

**Lecture Six : Conceptualizing Content**

**AIM :** Teach principles of content creation and management, focusing on clarity, coherence, and engagement.

**I -WHAT DOES IT MEAN ?**

The process of conceptualizing content is a multifaceted one which involves:

- thinking about what you want your students to learn in the course, given who they are, their needs, and the purpose of the course;
- making decisions about what to include and emphasize and what to drop;

- organizing the content in a way that will help you to see the relationship among various elements so that you can make decisions about objectives, materials, sequence and evaluation.

The product of conceptualizing content is a kind of syllabus in that it delineates what you will teach. The form it takes-mind map, grid, list, flow-chart, how detailed it is, whether it is one that someone else can interpret and use-is up to you. If you are given a syllabus, either as specifications of what is to be taught or in the form of a textbook, it is still important to go through the process of conceptualizing content so that on the one hand you can understand how the syllabus is constructed, and on the other hand can become aware of your own priorities with respect to your students. Such a process can give you tools to manage and adapt the syllabus as a resource rather than be governed by it.

Conceptualizing content involves answering the questions listed in the Figure below:

Questions that Guide Conceptualizing Content

1. What do I want my students to learn in this course, given who they are, their needs, and the purpose of the course?
2. What are my options as to what they can learn?
3. What are the resources and constraints of my course that can help me narrow my options?
4. What are the relationships among the options I have selected?
5. How can I organize these options into a working plan or syllabus?
6. What is the driving force or organizing principle that will pull my syllabus together?

Concep[illegible] explicitly focus on in the course and knowing why you have made those choices. It also involves choosing the organizing principle or principles that will help to tie the content together. In my first teaching experience in Taiwan, the choices had been made for me. Grammar and vocabulary were the organizing principles for the courses I taught.

Here is how one teacher, Iris Broudy, navigated the process of conceptualizing the content for a class of adults at an intermediate level of proficiency offered to the community by

the University of Orizaba in Mexico. Her students were mainly young professionals in their twenties

When I started the process] it was a given that my syllabus should be communicative, but I wondered: how can I determine its shape, its content, its "personality"? To visualize what my course would contain, I had to at least consider what I wanted the students to get out of it. I already had a sense of what they wanted; I knew what the institution required; I knew I wanted it to be fun. That background gave some direction to my initial brainstorming. But once I "got it all out there," I faced a major hurdle: How could I organize all these elements into a coherent syllabus?

She did an initial "mind map" of her course content and found that it revolved around functions because she felt that "communication means doing things with the language in order to interact with others." However, when she consulted texts specializing in functions of English she felt that they focused on "stock phrases to be 'plugged in' to various contexts" and that was too limiting. She writes:

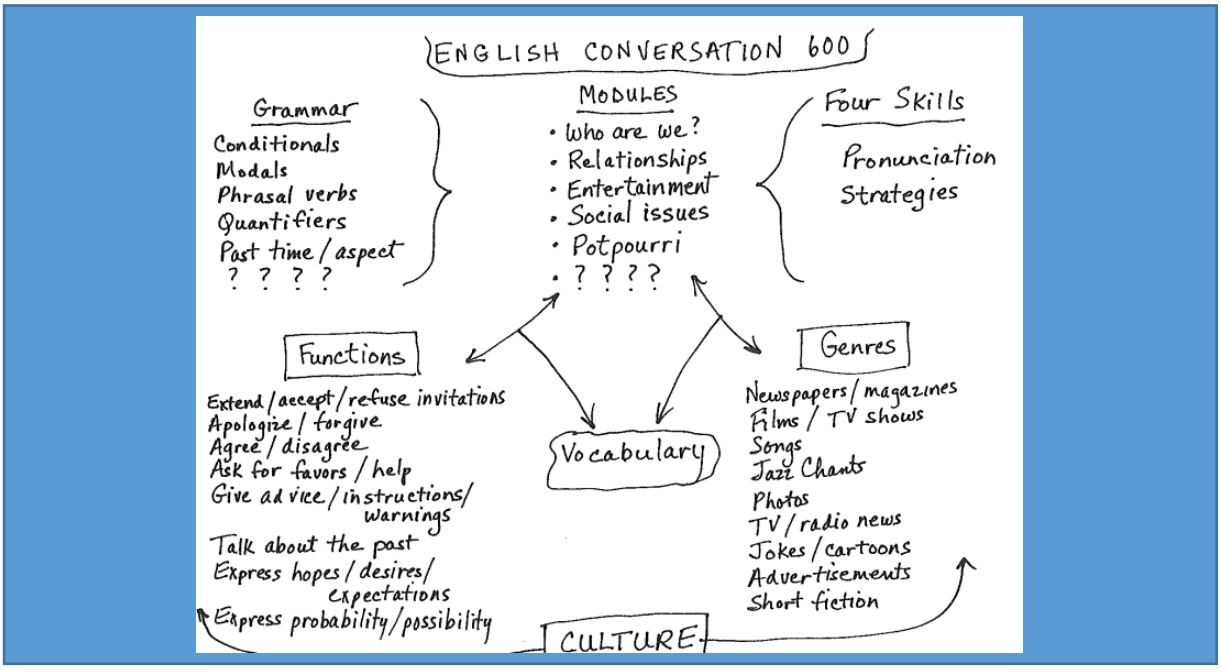
Furthermore, functional language is so contextual that without a certain level of sociolinguistic and discourse competence, the student cannot always sense which language is right for a given situation.

Clearly, if my classroom is to be an environment of real language use, I need to provide opportunities for my students to be exposed to authentic language and then produce it in a fashion that is both comfortable for them and acceptable to a native speaker. So I redid the mind map, this time putting topics at the center. When it came time to plan an actual unit, it was helpful to have a topic (dating/social relationships) around which to develop and sequence materials. It gave me a focus, and provided coherence for disparate curriculum elements. However, in laying out the syllabus-and later designing materials for one unit-I felt constrained by having the topics determined in advance.

She wonders if determining the topics in advance means that the learners, the ones who are learning to communicate, have been left out of the course. Uh-oh! Then were does that leave me? I have to throw away everything I've done and start over? *Whoa, Iris! Don't lose sight of the fact that right now the process is more important than the product.* That's true. What I am doing here is more than designing a course. I am translating my awareness

of who I am as a teacher and my deepest beliefs about the learning process into something tangible and usable. So instead of jumping into a whole new syllabus at this point, I need to ask myself: How can you use the syllabus and materials you have already developed in a more learner-centered way? In other words, how can you let go of the need to be in control, to let the students lead their own learning, even if the results are raggedy and imperfect?

Ideally, especially at the classroom level, the learners should be involved in "a process of consultation and negotiation." (Nunan, 1988) Okay, so that means working within a general framework but not having everything set in advance. It means trusting that I will be able to find and develop materials that fit the topics and communicative tasks that evolve from collaboration with the students. So maybe instead of planning around specific topics, I should think in broader modules or themes into which I can integrate various elements as needed. That would allow for more flexibility and allow the course to evolve more organically. So that is where I am now. The visual representations should give a sense of where I've traveled through this process of conceptualizing content. There never really will be a "finished" syllabus, because without input from the students, a plan is just a skeleton, not a complex living-and changing-organism.



## Iris Broudy's Final Mind Map

Iris has tried to capture the process she went through in conceptualizing the content of her course. The process she described was recursive-she made several drafts of her mind map syllabus based on different questions and considerations she grappled with as she planned. Major considerations were who the students were, what she believed they needed, and how she could involve them. She was acutely aware that she wanted the students to have some say in the syllabus itself. She was thus able to answer the questions John Kongsvik posed at the beginning of the chapter: How can I guess what my students will want to cover? By the same token, how can I prepare myself to meet their needs on an ongoing basis? What skills can I develop to meet these dynamic groups? How do I conceptualize the whole?

### Practice

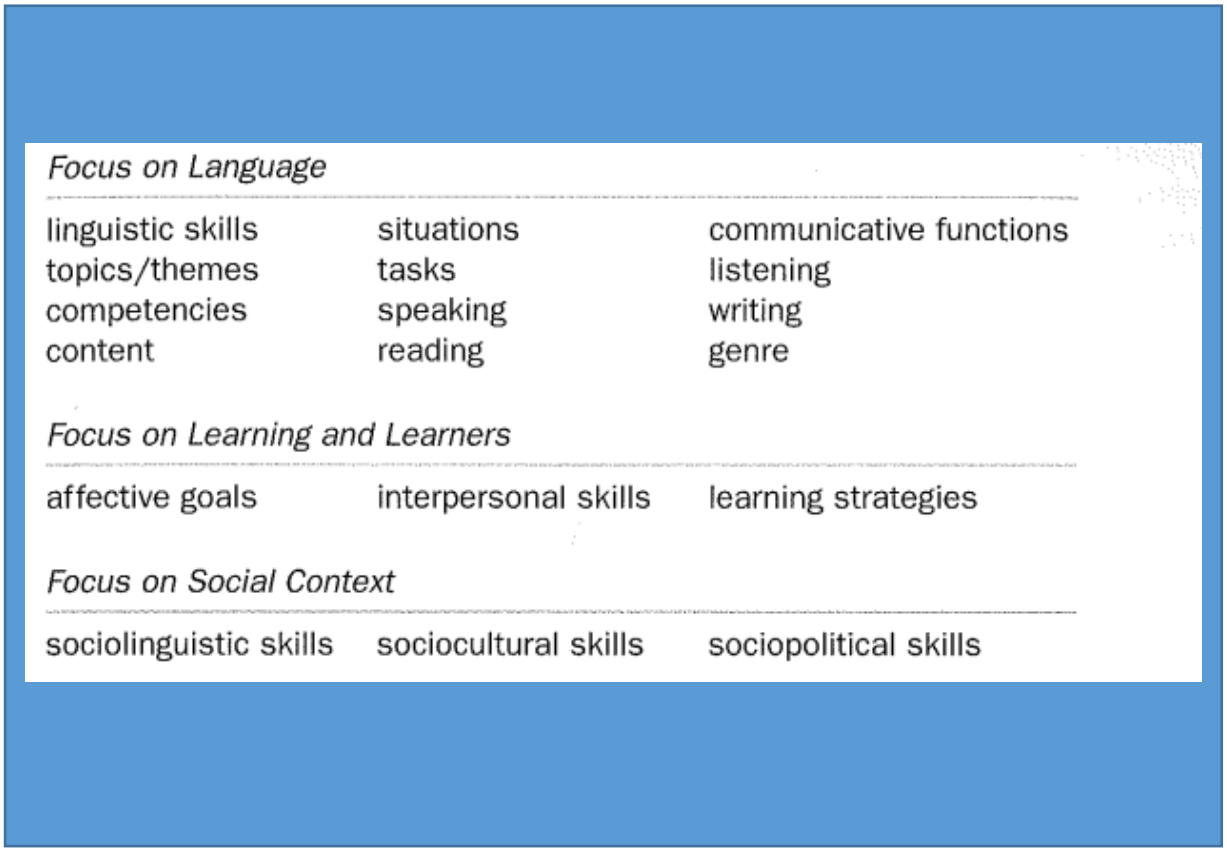
*Look at Iris Broudy's mind map. She has labeled different areas she wants to teach in her course. Those areas represent the way she conceptualized content. What are they? How do the areas interrelate? Does the mind map help you see a driving force or organizing principle for her course?*

### WHAT MAKES UP THE CONTENT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING?

Iris has drawn up a map of how she views the content of her course and the interrelationship among the various aspects of its content. The organizing principle, themes (which she has labeled "modules" on the map), enable her to choose and integrate functions, grammar, and vocabulary related to each theme. She has chosen to have students learn all four skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening, which they will develop with the aid of various authentic materials (listed under "Genres"), which she will select according to the theme. Additionally, students will learn about their own culture and the

culture of the L2 with respect to each theme. Conceptually, there is much more going on in Iris's course than in my classes when I first started teaching in Taiwan. In the 25 years between my course and hers, the ways in which we think about the "what" of language learning have expanded considerably. Below, I will describe some of those ways.

As a framework for organizing the ways or categories for conceptualizing ficontent, I use three of Stern's concepts introduced in Chapter 2: language, learning and the learner, and social context (1992). Thus each way of conceptualizing content fits in one of these three areas. Under language the categories are: linguistic skills, situations, topics or themes, communicative functions, competencies, tasks, content, speaking, listening, reading, writing, and genre. Under learning and the learner the categories are: affective goals, interpersonal skills and learning strategies. Under social context the categories are: sociolinguistic skills, sociocultural skills and sociopolitical skills.



## Categories for Conceptualizing Content

Two points are important to keep in mind when reading and thinking about the next section. First, the boundaries of the categories are not fixed, but permeable. They overlap and connect with other categories. This is because all are an attempt to break down the complex phenomenon of language and what it is, how one learns and uses it, and for which purposes. This means that when deciding what to include in your syllabus, one component will, by its nature, include other components. For example, you cannot focus on *topics* without including *vocabulary* and probably some kind of *situation* or *communicative function.* You cannot focus on *speaking* without including *listening. Genre* will involve one or more of the *four skills* as well as *sociolinguistic* or *sociopolitical* skills. Some of the categories are, in effect, combinations of others. For example, *competencies* are a combination of *situations, functions,* and *linguistic skills.* Second, under the language section in the framework, the categories include both "what"-knowledge, and "how"-skills or activities. This means that when you think about the content of the course, you can think about both *what* students will learn and *how* they will learn it. For example, if your course is skills based, as in a writing course, the what and how are intertwined. You may conceptualize the content in terms of a "what"-types of writing they will learn, but learning how to produce those types of writing involves a how-the actual process of writing. If your course is task-based, the emphasis will be on "how," or students doing tasks together.

I have tried to use names for the different areas of content that are familiar to teachers either from textbooks or from the literature in our field. This was easiest in the focus on language, which is the area that has been most "explored" in our field and is also the section that has the most categories. Even in that area there are competing definitions for various terms, such as "tasks." For this reason, I have tried to give examples of what each category means. For the section hat focuses on learning and learners I drew on what I have seen in the syllabuses of teachers I work with as well as the work of Stern. In that section, "learning strategies" has received the most attention in our field. For the section that focuses on

society and social context, I follow Stern's 1986 breakdown of sociolinguistic skills, sociocultural skills and sociopolitical skills.

Each category is followed by an example of how it might be implemented in a classroom. These examples are drawn from my most recent language learning experience, a course in American Sign Language (ASL), the language used by Deaf North Americans. As I have already pointed out, no language course can include all the categories explicitly. Therefore, when the ASL class did not address a given category, I explain how it might have addressed it.

## II -Focus ON LANGUAGE

### Linguistic Skills

Linguistic skills are those which focus on the systems that underlie the way language is structured: its **grammar, pronunciation,** and **lexicon.** This category is a familiar starting point in conceptualizing the content of a language courseespecially if one is teaching beginners. This area of language includes:

- **The sound system** (phonology) of the language. In syllabuses this is usually listed as **pronunciation.** This includes knowing how to produce the individual sounds of the language, to pronounce the unique combinations of sounds that form words, word stress,and sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation.
- The **grammar** of the language. This includes learning how words

are classified and what their function is, (e.g., pronouns, prepositions), how words are ordered to form phrases and sentences, the

verb tense system, and so on.

- The **lexicon or vocabulary** of the language. This includes learning a variety of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), knowing how words are formed (e.g., compounding, derivation), how they are inflected (e.g., made into plurals,), and the meaning of prefixes and suffixes (e.g., *unfathomable).*

The above areas are traditionally grouped together because they make up the sentence level of a language and are concerned with *relatively* predictable systems. A syllabus

organized around these elements of language is called a **structural syllabus** or a **formal syllabus.** These elements of language are familiar to anyone who has been a beginning language learner because they are the learner's lifeline.

***Situations***

Situations are the contexts in which one uses language. They typically include places where one transacts business, such as the supermarket, or the travel agency, or places where one interacts with others such as at a party. A syllabus built around situations is called a situational syllabus. Situations overlap with communicative functions in that the situational syllabus includes the type of transaction or interaction that will occur in the situation. For example, one requests information at the travel agency or socializes at a party. They also overlap with topics when there is a topic associated with the situation, such as food at the supermarket.

**Topics/Themes**

Topics are what the language is used to talk or write about. They may be personal, such as family, food, hobbies; they may be professional and relate to employment practices or topics specific to the profession of the students; they may be sociocultural and relate to education, political systems, or cultural customs. Topics and themes are often used interchangeably. For me, the difference is that themes are broader relative to topics, although topics can be very broad. Another difference is that a theme may tie a group of topics together. A syllabus built around topics is called a topical syllabus. A syllabus built around themes is called a thematic syllabus. Topics and themes provide a good backbone or organizing principle for a syllabus because it is easy to weave elements from other areas around the topics or themes.

**Communicative Functions**

The purposes for which one uses language are called language functions; (Wilkins 1976.) They include functions such as persuading, expressing preference, and apologizing. In my experience, functions have been expanded to mean any kind of transaction or interaction

such as "buying something," "asking for directions," "making small talk," and so on. Functions were initially paired with notions, in constructing a syllabus (Van Ek 1986). Notions include concepts such as quantity, distance, smell, and texture. In terms of syllabus types, the functional syllabus can be the organizing principle for a course; however, because functions need to be contextualized, they are often paired with situations. Additionally, some functions, such as apologizing, are not as amenable to a rich lesson as others such as expressing preferences. As Iris Broudy pointed out earlier in her narrative about developing a course, functional syllabuses often end up revolving around decontextualized inventories which are not particularly meaningful for the students. Notions tend to be abstract in conceptualization, so teachers often find it easier to make notions concrete in the form of topics. For example, the notion of quantity is learned within the topic of shopping, the notion of distance in the topic of transportation.

**Competencies**

Competencies unite situations, linguistic skills, and functions. A competency attempts to specify and teach the language and behavior needed to perform in a given situation, for example, how to perform in a job interview, how to open a bank account. Competencies are an attractive way to conceptualize content because the elements can be specified and their achievement can be measured. They are problematic, because, as I pointed out above, in most human interactions we cannot predict the path the interaction will take or the language used to get there and so, for a given competency, the language and behavior the student learns and is tested on may not be what she or he encounters or needs once outside of the classroom. Competency-based syllabuses are particularly popular in contexts where the sponsor or £under wants to see measurable results.

**Tasks**

Tasks have been defined in a number of ways. A simple definition is "interactions whose purpose is to get something done." Tasks entered the field of ESL and EFL teaching as a reaction to teaching that focused on predetermined content from the categories listed

above-grammar, vocabulary, functions, and so on. Tasks were seen as a way to promote classroom learning that focused on the *processes* of using language rather than language *products,* and on meaning as opposed to form (Nunan 1988). The assumption is that one develops language competence *through* action and interaction, not *as a result of* the interaction

How a task is accomplished involves negotiation on the part of the students. Additionally, the selection of the tasks themselves can be negotiated between teacher and students. Depending on one's students, tasks can be for work purposes, such as designing a brochure, for academic purposes, such as researching and writing an article, and for daily life, such as planning a trip. They can be an end in themselves as well as a means through which students perform functions, practice skills, and discuss topics. Some tasks approximate those performed in the real world, some are performed in the real world, and some are specific to the classroom. Information gap activities, in which student/group A has information needed by student/group B and vice versa, are a kind of task specific to the classroom.

One challenge with this area of conceptualizing what one will teach is that it encompasses such a broad range of activities, and that many tasks involve a series of smaller tasks. A syllabus which is built around tasks is called a taskbased syllabus. A task-based syllabus is in the family of process syllabuses. A process syllabus in its "strong" form is one in which there is no predetermined content or outcomes for the course. The content is negotiated between teacher and students depending on the way students perceive their needs (Breen 1989.) I have not included a process syllabus as a category of conceptualizing content because I feel that such an approach depends on a teacher being able to mobilize what he or she understands about the other categories of content in the service of the choices negotiated with the students. In terms of conceptualizing content, task-based syllabuses and participatory syllabuses (described below) are types of process syllabuses.

**Content**

Content is subject matter other than language itself. Courses in which students learn another subject (content) such as history or math or computer science through the L2 are organized around a content-based syllabus. The priority placed on the content relative to

the L2 may vary. There are different models, depending on this relationship which range from greatest emphasis on the language to greatest emphasis on the content. (See Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989 or Snow, Met and Genesee 1989.)

We did not learn particular content in my ASL class. To be content-based, the video we watched would have taught us math or history, for example, using ASL as the medium of instruction.

**Four skills: Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing**

The four skills are the channels or modes for using and understanding the language. They are sometimes called the macro skills of language. Conceptualizing language as discourse-stretches of sentences connected for a purpose either in speaking or writing-means moving beyond language at the sentence level, and beyond inventories of functions and learned dialogues. Learning the four skills involves understanding how different text types serve different purposes, and how texts are organized, so that one can understand them-through listening or reading-and produce them-through speaking or writing. It involves learning the subskills that enable one to be proficient in each skill.

- Speaking subskills include knowing how to negotiate turn-taking and producing fluent stretches of discourse.
- Listening subskills include listening for gist, for tone, for invitations to take a turn.
- Reading subskills include predicting content, understanding the main idea, interpreting the text.
- Writing subskills include using appropriate rhetorical structure, adjusting writing for a given audience, editing one's writing.

When one (or more) of the four skills is the organizing principle for a syllabus it means that the emphasis is on learning the skill itself, as distinct from using the skill for another purpose, for example, to reinforce grammar or to practice functions. A syllabus organized around one or more of the four skills is called a skills-based syllabus.

***Genre***

Language at the discourse level can also be viewed in terms of genre, communicative events or "whole" texts which accomplish certain purposes within a social context. Texts can range from an academic paper or presentation, to a supermarket flyer or phone message, to individual traffic signs. This approach to syllabus design draws on the systemic functional model of language (Halliday 1994) which sees language as a resource for making meaning and texts as the vehicle language users construct to make meaning. Those texts, in turn, are shaped by the social context in which they are used and by the interpersonal relationships among participants.

A course organized around genre or text would involve learners in understanding and analyzing texts on a number of levels including the lexico-grammatical level, the discourse

level, and the sociocultural level; it would also involve them in producing texts (Feez 1998).


## III-FOCUS ON LEARNING AND THE LEARNER

### Affective Goals

Affective goals are concerned with the learners' attitudes toward themselves, learning, and the target language and culture. Affective goals include developing a positive and confident attitude toward oneself as a learner, learning to take risks and to learn from one's

mistakes, and developing a positive attitude toward the target language and culture. It may also involve understanding one's attitude toward one's own language and culture.
In the first ASL class I was apprehensive about using sign language. When I tried to, I felt clumsy and inept. In our second ASL class, our instructor asked us to "turn off your voice." This put us into a kind of immersion and forced us to rely on different strategies to make sure we understood and got our meaning across. It made us less self-conscious about using sign language as a means of communication. While the instructor may not have had explicit affective goals, she was clearly aware of our affective needs.

**Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal skills involve how one interacts with others to promote learning. These are skills learners develop and use to interact with each other and with the teacher in the classroom. These skills are the basis for effective group work and cooperative learning. They include understanding and assuming different roles in a group and becoming an effective listener. One way this skill has been translated into a teaching goal is "Building a learning community." Another way is "Learning how to learn with others.

n my ASL class, the teacher did not emphasize interpersonal skills explicitly, although she helped us to learn each other's names (in sign) and asked us to work with each other in pairs and small groups. At times I was uncertain about how much initiative to take for fear of dominating the class. Because of my teaching background, I was acutely aware of the interpersonal dimension of the class.

**Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies focus explicitly on how one learns. They are the cognitive and metacognitive strategies we use to learn effectively and efficiently, such as monitoring our speech (self monitoring) or developing strategies for remembering new vocabulary. The aim behind developing learning strategies is two-fold. The first is to help students become aware of how they learn so that they can expand their repertoire of learning strategies and become effective learners in the classroom. The second is to help students develop ways to continue learning beyond the classroom. Thus, if a student learns to self-monitor or to use memory s=trategies in the classroom, the strategies can presumably be used outside of

the classroom when using the target language. If, as part of your course, you design activities to teach students to be aware of and develop specific learning strategies, then strategies are one of the ways you conceptualize the content of your course.

In my ASL class, we did not address learning strategies explicitly. To focus on learning strategies, the teacher could have asked us to share the ways we tried to remember new signs, or the techniques we had developed to practice outside of class. This would have helped us become aware of our own and others' strategies. She could also have taught us strategies for practicing and remembering signs, sentence structure, and so on.

## IV-Focus On Social Context

The three areas of social context below, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical, have a great potential for overlap, and it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. For example, the sociocultural expectations of men and women in a given culture may be reflected in sociolinguistic features such as how men address women and vice versa, or language used exclusively to describe one or the other. They may have sociopolitical implications depending on how the teacher and students view gender roles. Using the letter to the editor example from Chapter 3, learning about sociolinguistic features of a letter, such as appropriate salutation and closing, may overlap with a discussion about the cultural values implicit in such letters as well as the political implications of writing such a letter.

### Sociolinguistic Skills

Sociolinguistic skills involve choosing and using the appropriate language and extralinguistic behavior for the setting, the purpose, the role and relationship. These skills include knowing the level of politeness (register) to use, e.g., using more informal speech with peers or children, more formal speech with strangers; exhibiting appropriate extralinguistic behavior, e.g., how close to be and appropriate body language. They also involve using appropriate spoken or written formulaic phrases for certain situations. Sociolinguistic skills are context dependent and so are generally learned through and alongside situations, the four skills, or specific content.

### Sociocultural Skills

Sociocultural skills involve understanding cultural aspects of identity, values, norms, and customs such as those underlying kinship relationships, expectations of men and women, or gift-giving. Such understanding enables us to interpret explicit and implicit messages and behave and speak in a culturally appropriate way. Sociocultural skills are rooted in intercultural understanding in the sense that one must understand one's own cultural identity, values, norms, and customs, in order to know how and how much one can adapt to the target culture. Each episode of the video we watched in the ASL class was accompanied by worksheets. There was a true-false or multiple choice "pretest" to test one's knowledge of culture, grammar, and vocabulary. The first question on the pretest for episode one was a true-false question: "Deaf people actually have their own culture." This question served to alert learners that Deafness is a culture, not a handicap. Another worksheet dealt specifically with cultural aspects of ASL and was labeled "Cultural notes." The culture notes for episode one pointed out that Deaf people have their own distinct culture (hence the capital D), with its own set of shared customs and values, equal to other cultures, and,

as in any language instruction, cultural information would be included when studying ASL.

**Sociopolitical Skills**

Sociopolitical skills involve learning to think critically and take action for effective change in order to participate effectively in one's community. These skills include learning how to navigate systems such as medical, school, and employment systems, to know one's rights and responsibilities within them, and to take action to make positive changes. Sociopolitical skills also involve learning to be critically aware of how both spoken and written language are used to help or hinder a given social group. This has been called "critical language awareness" (Fairclough 1992.) The sociopolitical focus is most evident in programs for adult learners in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States. The participatory syllabus (Auerbach 1992) is an example of a syllabus that emphasizes learning to effect changes in one's community and workplace.

In my ASL class, the instructor, who was taught to use her "voice" in her own schooling, chose to use only sign and asked us to use only sign. This was a sociopolitical decision on

her part because the schooling of Deaf children in "oracy," the use of their vocal cords, is regarded by many Deaf people as a form of oppression since it has prevented them from developing ASL as their first language. In the video episode about the home, we learned about accessibility; for example, visual modifications such as flashing lights when the doorbell rings and how to use the TTY (voice relay) telephone. The worksheet that accompanied the unit asked us to consider a number of questions including the following ones: "Think about how it would be if you were Deaf. How would you gain access to educational opportunities, emergency medical care, movies and theate1; social events, etc.?" "Who should pay these costs?"

To summarize, the ways of conceptualizing content related to social context include:

- sociolinguistic skills
- sociocultural skills
- sociopolitical skills

The chart below summarizes the possible ways to conceptualize content, with examples of each.

## Focus on Language

| *Linguistic Skills* | *Situations* |
|---|---|
| pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary<br>e.g., intonation, verb tenses, prefixes and suffixes | the contexts in which language is used<br>e.g., at the supermarket, at a party |
| *Topics/Themes* | *Communicative Functions* |
| what the language is used to talk about<br>e.g., family relations, the environment | what the language is used for<br>e.g., expressing preferences, asking for directions |
| *Competencies* | *Tasks* |
| language and behavior to perform tasks<br>e.g., opening a bank account, applying for a job | what you accomplish with the language<br>e.g., planning a trip, designing a brochure |
| *Content* | *Speaking* |
| subject matter other than language<br>e.g., science, architecture | oral skills<br>e.g., turn-taking, producing fluent stretches of discourse |
| *Listening* | *Reading* |
| aural comprehension skills<br>e.g., listening for gist, for tone, for invitations to take a turn | understanding written texts and learning reading subskills<br>e.g., predicting content, understanding the main idea, interpreting the text |
| *Writing* | *Genre* |
| producing written texts and learning writing subskills<br>e.g., using appropriate rhetorical structure, adjusting writing for a given audience, editing one's writing | spoken and written texts that accomplish a purpose within a social context<br>e.g., analyzing a text in terms of its purpose and how it achieves the purpose within the social context; producing texts |

**Focus on Learning and the Learner**

| *Affective Goals* | *Interpersonal Skills* | *Learning Strategies* |
|---|---|---|
| attitudes toward learning, language, and culture<br>e.g., developing confidence, learning from one's mistakes | how one interacts with others to promote learning<br>e.g., learning to work effectively in groups | how one learns<br>e.g., self-monitoring, memory techniques |

**Focus on Social Context**

| *Sociolinguistic Skills* | *Sociocultural Skills* | *Sociopolitical Skills* |
|---|---|---|
| choosing and using appropriate language<br>e.g., levels of politeness, body language | understanding cultural norms and their relation to one's own<br>e.g., expectations of men and women, gift-giving | learning to critique and take action for effective change<br>e.g., navigating systems, critical interpretation of text |

**Practice**

Find two different textbooks for ESL!EFL. Look through their tables of contents. How does each author conceptualize content? Which of the categories in the last figure are included? What is the organizing principle (or principles) that integrates the other elements?

**V-CONSTRUCTING A MIND MAP**

Each of the mind maps we have seen is different, not only because of the difference in the course being taught, but because of the difference in the way the individual teacher conceives and portrays it. The first step in drawing a mind map involves brainstorming everything you want to include in the course in map form, rather than list form. This is like the "discovery draft" in writing. It will be edited later.


**A Mind Map Example**

## Practice

a mind map is a non-linear way of representing the content itself, as well as factors affecting the content. A mind map enables you to see the course as a whole, the component parts, and the multiple relationships among the parts. This is equally true for a course you are designing from scratch as for a course with a prescribed syllabus. Do step la if you are designing a course from scratch. Do step 1 b if you are working with a prescribed syllabus or text.

la. Take out a sheet of paper and do a first map of how you conceptualize your course. Ask yourself, *What do I feel is most important for my students to learn given their needs and the resources and constraints of my situation?* Use words, phrases, and images to capture the areas you feel are important, as well as any questions that arise. Feel free to draw circles around them, use arrows, question marks. Use more than one sheet, if everything doesn't fit. The purpose of this first version of the mind map is to get out all the elements you feel you need to consider in planning what will go into your course.

**1**b. Study the prescribed syllabus or text carefully. Then capture the content of the syllabus in a mind map. The mind map should show the relationship among the various elements of the syllabus as well as which elements are the driving forces.

Now show on the mind map what you feel to be most important for your students to learn given their needs and the resources and constraints of the situation. Add elements that you feel are missing and look at ways they connect to the existing syllabus.

2. Show your mind map to a colleague. Let him or her ask questions about it. As you explain the mind map, make a note of relationships and hierarchies. Do some categories seem more important than or flow from others? Do images come to mind that capture what you are trying to show or that connect various elements?

Next steps involve sorting the information into categories, providing examples of the categories, and looking for ways in which different categories connect. You want to figure out the **relationships** both within the categories and among the categories. You also want to see what kind of syllabus you have, which category or categories are the driving forces of the syllabus.

**Practice**

After each of you has had a chance to talk through your mind map, do a "second draft" incorporating ideas from the discussion and responses to these questions:

- Within a category, are the examples of equal importance?
- Do the examples sort themselves into sub-categories?
- Is there overlap among categories that suggests some kind of streamlining?

- Are there categories that are the driving force or organizing principle, out of which other categories flow?

Do images come to mind that help to capture the nature and relationship of the elements of the map?

**Lecture Seven : Formulating Goals and Objectives**

Aim : By the end of the lecture, students will be able to formulate goals and objectives

If you haven't had experience with formulating goals and objectives, you will probably go through a few drafts or need to put the first draft aside and come back to it once you have worked on other aspects of your course. The goals themselves or the wording may change. You will write them differently if you plan to give them to your students or if they provide a working document for you. You will be clearest about them after you have finished teaching the course! However, once you have learned the "discipline" of writing goals and objectives you will find that they will help you make decisions so that you can shape a coherent and satisfying course.

Dylan Bate, a teacher who designed a course for university students in China, expresses this view in this way:

> *Teaching is making choices. There are many worthy and precious things that can be done in the second language classroom, but they can't all be done. Choices must be made, and the only appropriate arbitrator in these decisions are the goals and purposes defined by the teacher for the specific course in its specific context. Once I realized this, the other parts of the puzzle either became irrelevant or quickly fell into place.*

**Practice**

*What has been your experience with formulating goals and objectives?*Do *you feel more like Dylan Bate? More like Denise Lawson? Why?*

## I- WHAT ARE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AND WHAT Is THEIR RELATIONSHIP?

### *Goals*

Goals are a way of putting into words the main purposes and intended outcomes of your course. If we use the analogy of a journey, the destination is the goal; the journey is the course. The objectives are the different points you pass through on the journey to the destination. In most cases, the destination is composed of multiple goals which the course helps to weave together. Sometimes, teacher and students reach unexpected places. When

you do veer "off course," it may be because you need to adjust your course for a more suitable destination for your students and so you must redefine and refine your goals. On the other hand, goals can help you stay on course, both as you design the course and as you teach it.

Stating your goals helps to bring into focus your visions and priorities for the course. They are general statements, but they are not vague. For example, the goal "Students will improve their writing" is vague. In contrast, "By the end of the course students will have become more aware of their writing in general and be able to identify the specific areas in which improvement is needed" while general, is not vague. It also suggests that there will be other goals which give more information about the ways in which students will improve their writing.

A goal states an aim that the course will explicitly address in some way. If, for example, one of the goals of a course is to help students develop learning strategies or interpersonal skills, then class time will be explicitly devoted to that goal. Because class time is limited, and the number of goals is not, choice is important. While you may be able to think of many laudable goals, they should address what can be realistically achieved within the constraints and resources of your course, i.e., who the students are, their level, the amount of time available, the materials available. They should be achievable within the time frame of the course with that group of students.

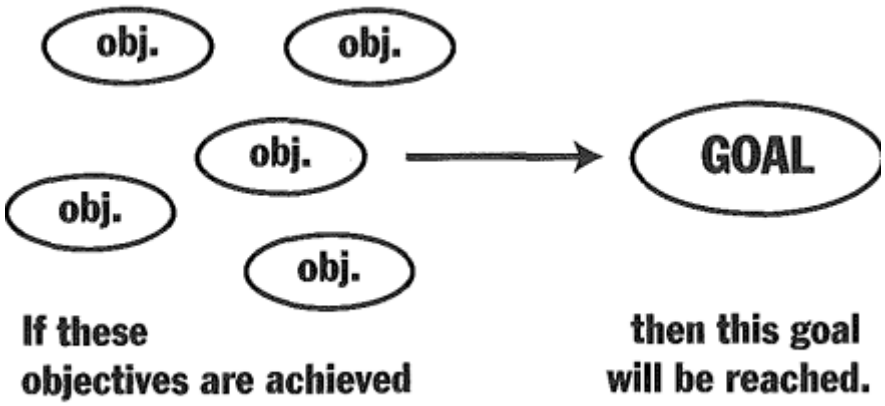

**Figure :Making Choices about Goals**

**II- Objectives**

Objectives are statements about how the goals will be achieved. Through objectives, a goal is broken down into learnable and teachable units. By achieving the objectives, the goal will be reached. For this reason, the objective must relate to the goal. For example, in a first pass at formulating goals for his course, one teacher stated one goal as, "Students will be able to interact comfortably with each other in English." One of the objectives he listed under that goal was for students to learn to tell stories. There is nothing wrong with students learning to tell stories, but telling stories generally does not require interaction, and so for this teacher's goal, learning to tell stories was not the most appropriate objective. The teacher asked himself, "Will achieving this objective help to reach the goal?" When he determined that the answer was no, he eliminated that objective and sought other, more appropriate objectives.

The following analogy was used by two teachers in an EFL reading class, Carolyn Layzer and Judy Sharkey, to help their students understand goals, objectives and strategies.
I told the students that a friend wanted to lose 10 pounds that she had gained over the winter. I wrote, "I want to lose 10 pounds" on the left side of the board. Then I asked the students for some advice on how to achieve her goal. I wrote their responses on the right side of the board. Some of their advice was very general, for example, "exercise" and "don't eat junk food." I told them my friend's schedule was very busy and asked what kind of exercise she could do given her time constraints. This led to some more specific suggestions, for example, "She should always take the stairs instead of the elevator." Students could see that the more specific the advice, the easier it would be to follow it.

Showing how the suggestions could cause the effect of losing weight illustrates the relationship between goals and objectives: If I work out at the gym and stop eating junk food, then I am likely to achieve my goal of losing 10 pounds. My first objective is to set up a regular gym routine; My second objective is to stop eating junk food.
Thus another aspect of the relationship between goals and objectives is that of cause and effect. If students achieve A, B, C objectives, then they will reach Y goal. Figure 5.2 tries to capture the cause and effect relationship between goals and objectives. In principle, this is a good idea. In practice, students may not achieve the goal or may achieve other goals the teacher hadn't intended. Using the losing weight analogy above, the workout at the gym may improve muscle tone and density, and because muscle weighs more than fat, weight loss due to the reduction in junk food may be minimized. However, the person may end up feeling more energetic and not care about the weight loss anymore! On the other hand, if the goal remains important and is not achieved through the means or objectives described above, then the objectives may need to be examined and changed or refined so that the goal can be reached.




**Goals and Objectives' Relationships**

Objectives are in a hierarchical relationship to goals. Goals are more general and objectives more specific. Brown (1995) points out that one of the main differences between goals and objectives is their level of specificity. For every goal, there will be several objectives to help achieve it, as depicted in Figure 5.3. Goals are more long term, objectives more short term. To return to the weight loss analogy above, losing weight could be an objective if there is a larger goal, for example to improve one's overall health. Some teachers have found it helpful to have three layers of goals and objectives. The important point is that each layer is more and more specific.

Formulating goals and objectives is something helps toward to build which a clear you vision will of explicitly what you will teach. Because a goal is something towards which you will explicitly teach ,stating goals helps to define priorities and to make choices. Clear goals help to make teaching purposeful because what you do in class is related to your overall purpose. Goals and objectives provide a basis for making choices about what to teach and how. Objectives serve as a bridge between needs and goals. Stating goals and objectives is a way of holding yourself accountable throughout the course. Goals are not a "wish list." For example, if one of your goals is for students to be able to identify areas of improvement in their writing, then you will need to design ways for students to evaluate their writing as well as ways to assess their effectiveness in identifying those areas they

need to improve. Finally, a clear set of goals and objectives can provide the basis for your assessment plan.

## III-WHAT ARE WAYS TO FORMULATE AND ARTICULATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

### Examples of goals

The goals and objectives you will read about below were written by the teachers for themselves to serve as a planning tool for their courses. When you write your own goals, you should keep in mind the audience for the goals. If it is your students, you will need to consider whether the language you use is accessible to them. Even if you alone are the audience for the goals and objectives, you should try to make them transparent enough for someone else to understand. Unpack the language to simplify and clarify it and also to find out if what you thought was one goal or objective is actually more than one.

**Practice :**

**Study the two sets of goals for two writing courses below.**

1-What do you like about each set? What don't you like about each one? Why?

2. What do the goals tell you about each teacher's course? About their beliefs?

3. What are similarities and differences in the way the goals are stated?

The goals below are David Thomson's goals for his course, "Writing using computers." The course is for intermediate to high intermediate level students in an Intensive English program in the United States. It meets for 30 hours over 4 weeks.

***Goals for a "Writing Using Computers" Course***

***<u>Awareness</u>***

Goal 1. By the end of the course, students will have become more aware of their writing in general and be able to identify the specific areas in which improvement is needed.

***Teacher***

Goal 2. Throughout this course, the teacher will clearly communicate to students what his standards are for successful completion of tasks.

Goal 3. By the end of the course, the teacher will have developed a greater understanding of student needs and will make adjustments to ensure these needs can be met the next time he teaches the course.

***Attitude***

Goal 4. By the end of the course, students will have developed a positive attitude toward writing.

***Skills***

Goal 5. By the end of the course, students will have developed the ability to use the computer for a variety of purposes.

Goal 6. By the end of the course, students will improve their writing to the next level of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines Writing scale.

***Knowledge***

Goal 7. By the end of the course students will be able to understand the elements of and what constitutes "good writing"

Goal 8. By the end of the course, students will be able to understand the appropriateness of using computers for different writing and research purposes.

The following goals are for Denise Lawson's 10 week, 40 hour, Advanced Composition course in a university extension program in the United States.

**IV-Goals for an Advanced Composition Course**

***A- Proficiency***

Students will develop effective writing skills transferable to any context.

***B- Cognitive***

Students will gain an awareness of the influence of sociocultural issues on their writing.

C **.** ***Affective***

Students will develop confidence in their ability to write in English.

Students will develop an appreciation for the contribution their knowledge and experience (and that of their peers) makes to the learning process.

***C-Transfer***

Students will gain an understanding of how they can continue to improve their writing skills

David and Denise have organized their goals in different ways. David has used a framework which he calls "A TASK," which is derived from the KASA (knowledge, awareness, skill, attitude) framework, and Denise uses Stern's 1992 framework of cognitive goals, proficiency goals, affective goals, and transfer goals. I will explain those frameworks in more detail below. For some teachers, frameworks are helpful as a way of organizing their goals. For other teachers, the categories they have used to conceptualize content, for example, functional, topical, grammatical, tasks, reading, writing, affective, etc., provide the categories for the goals. Denise Maksail-Fine conceptualized the content for her high school Spanish course in the categories of speaking, listening, reading, writing, cross-cultural skills, and cooperative learning skills. These categories provide the basis for her goals below.

**V-Formulating goals**

The first step is to list all the possible goals you could have for your particular course, based on your conceptualization of content, your beliefs, and/or your assessment of students' needs.

The list may be ragged, it may not be clear what is truly a goal or how to state it, and there may be repetition and overlap. Next steps are to look for redundancies, and to identify priorities based on your beliefs and your context. What is most important to you? What

are the expectations of the institution, the students? Because all of these factors come into play, your goals will go through several drafts as you consider different aspects of the course and as you try to make the way you express them clearer.

**Practice**

*Make an initial list of goals for your course. Keep in mind the image of a destination with multiple aspects or the formula "The course will be successful if . .. "*

Once you have a list of or a map of your goals , how do you oragnise them into a coherent plan? One way to organize your goals, is to use categories you have used for conceptualizing content. These categoriesmight include communicative functions, topics, grammar, tasks, reading, writing, interpersonal skills, etc. For example, if your course integrates the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, then you can have four major goals, each one related to a skill.

Stern has developed a framework for setting objectives.He proposed the following categories :

**Proficiency:** these include what students will be able to do with the language (e.g., mastery of skills, ability to carry out functions).

**Cognitive**: these goals include explicit knowledge, information and conceptual learning about language (e.g., grammar and otl1er systematic aspects of communication) and about culture (e.g., about rules of conduct, norms, values).

**Affective**: these include achieving positive attitudes toward the target language and culture as well as to one's own learning of them.

**Transfer:** these include learning how what one does or learns in the classroom can be transferred outside of the classroom in order to continue learning.

Denise Lawson used Stern's framework to organize the goals for her composition course. She writes the following:

> [My] goals and objectives are a direct expression of my teaching principles. As I have already mentioned, I have found formulating goals and objectives

to be the most difficult part of th~ curriculum design process. After experimenting with different formats (including categories based on Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Awareness), I decided to use Stern (1992). This format makes sense to me because it addresses four areas I want to emphasize: proficiency, cultural knowledge, students' attitudes, and learning strategies. I determined one goal each for Stern's Proficiency, Cognitive, and Transfer categories, and two for the Affective category. Five broad goals are appropriate and achievable for a forty-hour course.

## VI-FORMULATING OBJECTIVES

A classic work on formulating objectives is Robert Mager's 1962 book on performance objectives, written when behaviorism and stimulus-response theories of learning were still in vogue. Mager suggests that for an objective to be useful, it should contain three components: performance, condition, and criterion. Performance describes what the learners will be able to do, condition describes the circumstances in which the learners are able to something, and criterion, the degree to which they are able to do something. To these three components, Brown (1995) adds subject, who will be able to do something, and measure, "how the performance will be observed or tested." (p.89) For example, look at this objective from Brown and the five components below it.

*Students at the Guangzhou English Language Center will be able to write missing elements on the appropriate lines in a graph, chart, or diagram from information provided in a 600-word 11th grade reading level general science passage.*

Subject: students at the GELC
Performance: write missing elements ... in a graph, chart, or diagram from information provided in a ... passage."
Conditions: on the appropriate lines ... 600 word 11th grade reading level general science passage

Measure: to write the correct words (observable part of the objective)
Criterion: the criterion is 100%, all the missing elements

**5.9: Brown's Components of Performance Objectives, Adapted from Mager**

**Subject:** who will achieve the objective
**Performance:** what the subject will be able to do
**Conditions:** the way in which the subject will be able to perform
**Measure:** the way the performance will be observed or measured
**Criterion:** how well the subject will be able to perform

Another way to formulate objectives is to use a framework developed by Saphier and Gower (1987). Saphier and Gower's cumulative framework includes coverage, activity, involvement, mastery, and generic thinking objectives. Coverage objectives describe the material (textbook units, topics, curriculum items) to be covered in the course. They point out that, unfortunately, that is the way in which many teachers (and administrators) view a given course: it "covers" the material in Book 2, or the items on the curriculum list, irrespective of whether the students actually learn the material. Activity objectives describe what the students will do with the material. For example, fill out a worksheet or answer comprehension questions about a reading. Involvement objectives describe how the students will become engaged in working with the material. For example, make up their own comprehension questions about a reading and give to peers to answer. Mastery objectives (also called learning objectives) describe what the students will be able to do as a result of a given class or activity. For example, to use and describe two different reading strategies. Generic thinking objectives (which I also call critical thinking objectives) describe the meta-cognitive problem-solving skills the students will acquire. For example, to explain how they decide which reading strategies are appropriate for which texts.

**VII-Saphier and Gower's Cumulative Framework for Objectives**

**coverage**: the material that will be covered in the unit, lesson activity: what students will do in a unit, lesson

**involvement**: how students will become engaged in what they do in the unit, lesson

**mastery**: what students will be able to do as a result of the unit, lesson generic thinking: how students will be able to problem solve or critique in the unit, lesson

Denise Lawson used the Stern categories for her goals and the Saphier and Gower framework for her objectives for her advanced composition course. She writes:

The objectives are listed under the categories: Activity, Involvement, Mastery, and Critical Thinking. An additional category, "Coverage" suggested by Saphier and Gower, was not appropriate for my purposes here because it relates to material covered, such as chapters in a textbook. In place of a textbook I have prepared a diverse list of materials (including literature, films, and songs) that will be selected as writing prompts by the students; as a result, I do not have specific "Coverage" objectives.

Below are her first goal and the objectives. For the complete set of goals and objectives

**VII-First Goal and Objectives for an Advanced Composition Course**

**II. Proficiency**

Students will develop effective writing skills transferable to any context.

***Activity***

- Students will use a five-step process writing model to write three paragraphs: descriptive, personal narrative (memory), and expository; two essays; and a group research paper.
- Students will use assessment forms to evaluate their own and their peers' writing.
- Students will annotate their reading and maintain reading logs.

*Involvement*

- Students will develop criteria for a well-written paragraph, essay, and short research paper.

- Students will work with peers to generate ideas, get feedback, and to write a research paper.

***Mastery***

- Students will be able to use the process writing model.
    - Students will be able to assess writing (their own and others') based on criteria for good writing.

***Critical thinking***

Students will be able to determine and articulate characteristics of a well-written paragraph, essay, and short research paper.

**Practice**

*What do you like about Denise Lawson's approach to goals and objectives? What don't you like? How would you adapt the approach? Why?What are the similarities and differences between Denise Lawson's and Denise Mal<.sailFine's way of stating objectives?*

Below is a summary of guidelines to consider when formulating goals and objectives:
1. Goals should be general, but not vague.
2. Goals should be transparent. Don't use jargon.
3. A course is successful and effective if the goals have been reached.Try this "formula" for your goals: if we accomplish [goal], will the course be successful?
4. Goals should be realistic. They shouldn't be what you want to achieve, but what you can achieve. They should be achievable within the time frame of the course with that group of students.
5. Goals should be relatively simple. Unpack them and make them into more than one goal, if necessary.
6. Goals should be about something the course will explicitly address in some way. In other words, you will spend class time to achieve that goal.
7. Objectives should be more specific than goals. They are in a hierarchical relationship to goals.
8. Objectives should directly relate to the goals. Ask yourself: "Will achieving 'x objective help to reach 'y' goal?"
9. Objectives and goals should be in a cause-effect relationship: "if objective, then goal."
10. Objectives should focus on what students will learn (e.g., students will be able to write a term paper) and/or processes associated with it (e.g., be able to make an outline), not simply on the activity (e.g., students will write a term paper).
11. 0 bjectives are relatively short term. Goals are relatively long term.

12. There should be more objectives than goals. However, one objective may be related to more than one goal.
13. Don't try to pack too much into one objective. Limit each objective to a specific skill or language area.
14. The goals and objectives give a sense of the syllabus of the course. Objectives are like the building blocks of the syllabus.
15. A clear set of goals and objectives provides the basis for evaluation of the course (goals) and assessment of student learning (objectives).

**Lecture Eight : Assessing Needs**

**Aim : help students understand and master the notion of needs assessment**

**Warming Up**

*In your experiences as a learner, have you ever been invited to express your learning needs? If no, why not? If yes, what was your reaction? What was the result?*

Jeri in many Manning's ways experience typical of teachers with needs who assessment, are exploring whichhow she to describes work with below, it in is systematic ways. Her description serves as a point of departure for the chapter, because she raises interesting issues about the hows, whats, and whens of needs assessment. She describes her experience during her teaching practicum.

Prior to doing my MA, I had done needs assessment only on an informal level. My needs assessment was done through my own observations, and by asking students for oral input on what they would like to do in class. Because I taught the same students for a year or more, we had a level of trust that allowed them to give me honest feedback.

In my MA courses, I learned more about needs assessment. During my internship at an intensive English program in Boston, I decided to try doing a couple of written needs assessments with my students. I observed my mentor's class during the month of January and taught my own class in February. One of the needs assessments that I adopted was one that my mentor had used. The curriculum for each level has so many items in it that no teacher could cover it all in one month. I gave the students a copy of the curriculum and asked them to mark the points they were most interested in learning. Then I tallied the answers, to give me a guideline of students' interests and perceived needs. One concern that I had, however, was that students would be overwhelmed by all the information on the sheet. However, this did not seem to be the case. I also did formal needs assessments that dealt with students' learning styles and knowledge of grammar.

The needs assessments did give me useful information about my students, which helped me to shape the curriculum as the month progressed. There are points that I would change, however. First, I think it was a mistake to give three written forms of needs assessment in the first two days. It felt like too much paper coming at the students at once. In fact, I had one more needs assessment that I decided not to use. I felt torn, however, because students were only there for one month, and I wanted to be as responsive to them as possible. If I

had the course to do over, I would space the needs assessments out, relax, and rely on my observation skills more.

Another change that I would make would be to integrate needs assessment into the lesson plan, so that it becomes an integral part of the lesson, rather than an interruption in the flow. By doing that, I would hope that in addition to making the class flow smoothly, students would feel more willing to give honest feedback, especially given that a month is not a lot of time for students to learn that you really do want their *honest* feedback. Essentially, I want to develop needs assessments that will be an effective use of class time for students and give me the information I need to structure an effective course.

**Practice**

*Write a short description of your experience with needs assessment as a teacher. What have you assessed? Did you get the information you wanted? What did you do with the information?*

## I- THE ROLE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE

Essentially, needs assessment is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs. It is an orientation toward the teaching learning process which views it as a dialogue between people: between the teacher and administrators, parents, other teachers; between the teacher and learners; among the learners. It is based on the belief that learning is not simply a matter of learners absorbing pre-selected knowledge the teacher gives them, but is a process in which learners-and others-can and should participate. It assumes that needs are multi-faceted and changeable. When needs assessment is used as an ongoing part of teaching, it helps the learners to reflect on their learning, to identify their needs, and to gain a sense of ownership and control of their learning. It establishes learning as a dialogue between the teacher and the learners and among the learners.

Seeing understood needs it. assessment My first encounter as a formwith of dialogue needs assessment is not theasway a formal I originally undertaking was reading through Munby's 1978 book, *Communicative Syllabus Design,* in which he outlined numerous and detailed specifications for determining learners' needs. I was teaching English in Japan at the time, primarily to Japanese employees of a US-Japanese joint venture company. As a language teacher, I wondered how I would ever be able to get so much information, and if I could, what I would do with it. The lists and level of detail scared me off. In fact, had I known then what I know now about needs assessment, I believe I could have designed and taught a more focused and responsive course. Some years later, when I was writing the *East West* series, my co-authm~ David Rein, and I found the needs assessment inventories developed by the Council of Europe (VanEk 1986) for planning language programs to be an extremely useful tool in conceptualizing and organizing the content of the series.

Needs assessment has been an important feature of ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes), and adult education courses. While much has been written about program needs assessment (e.g., Berwick 1989, Brindley 1989, Brown 1995), adult education has taken the lead in looking at needs assessment as part of teaching, not something done only prior to teaching (e.g., Burnaby 1989, Savage 1993). In my experience as a teacher and with teachers, for needs assessment to be meaningful at the course level, it needs to be understood as something that teachers can see and do as part of teaching.

I remember a conversation with a teacher from Honduras to whom I had given a copy of David Nunan's *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* (1989). She came to my office in a state of panic. She used her hands to describe her feeling that the ground was shifting under her feet and she could no longer maintain her balance. The book suggested that she invite learners to give input into the design of activities, and she didn't see how this was possible or even a good idea. She mainly taught pre-teens and teenagers, so she had a point. But the conversation was really about a shift in her perception of the role of the learners and the teacher in the classroom. I think that needs assessment, as I have described it above, is one place in the development of a course in which a teacher must examine how she or he views the roles and power dynamic in the classroom.

The teacher is not the only person who has views about the roles and power dynamic in the classroom or the needs of the learners. The students themselves will have expectations that may *not* include being asked to express their needs or to be partners in decision making. In fact, they may see it as clearly the teacher's role to make decisions about what to teach. If partnership and dialogue are at the root of one's view of needs assessment, then it must be done in such a way that students feel skillful in participating and see the value of it, both while doing it and in the results. Likewise, teachers need to learn how to feel skillful in conducting and responding to needs assessment.

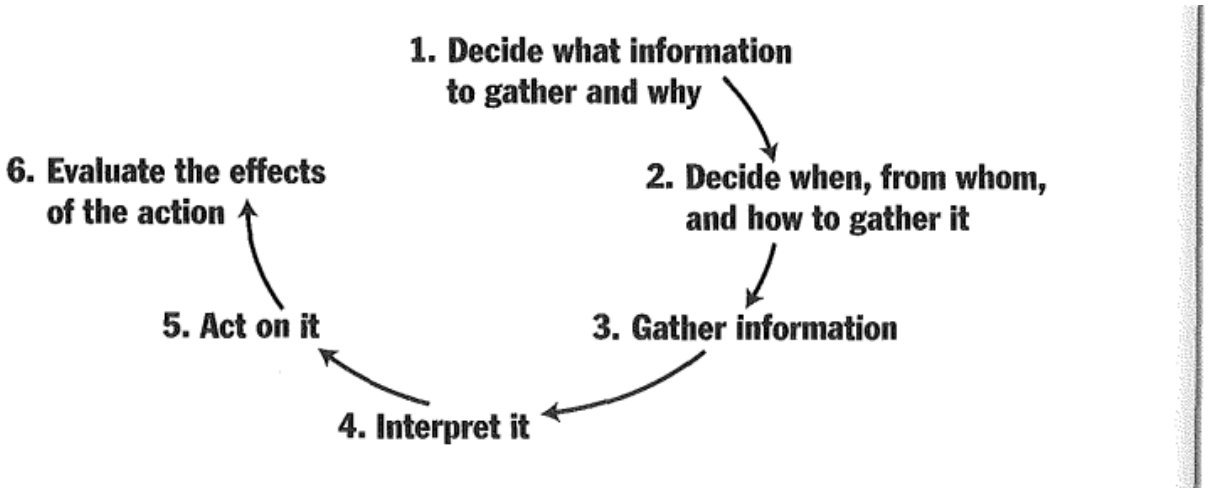
What can happen in the classroom is also affected and determined by the institution the class is a part of, and by other stakeholders, such as parents and ftmders, depending on the setting. Needs assessment can be as much about reconciling different views as about finding out what the needs are. Berwick, for example, makes a distinction between "felt needs," those the learners have, and "perceived needs," the way the needs are viewed by the teacher, the institution and other stakeholders (1989, p. 55). Even when needs assessment only involves the teacher and learners it is still a complex undertaking because different learners within the same class usually have somewhat different needs.

## II-THE PROCESS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The process of needs assessment involves a set of decisions, actions, and reflections, that are cyclical in nature:

1. Deciding what information to gather and why
2. Deciding the best way to gather it: when, how and from whom
3. Gathering the information
3. Interpreting the information
4. Acting on the information
5. Evaluating the effect and effectiveness of the action
6. Deciding on further or new information to gather

This process can be viewed as a cycle as depicted below:



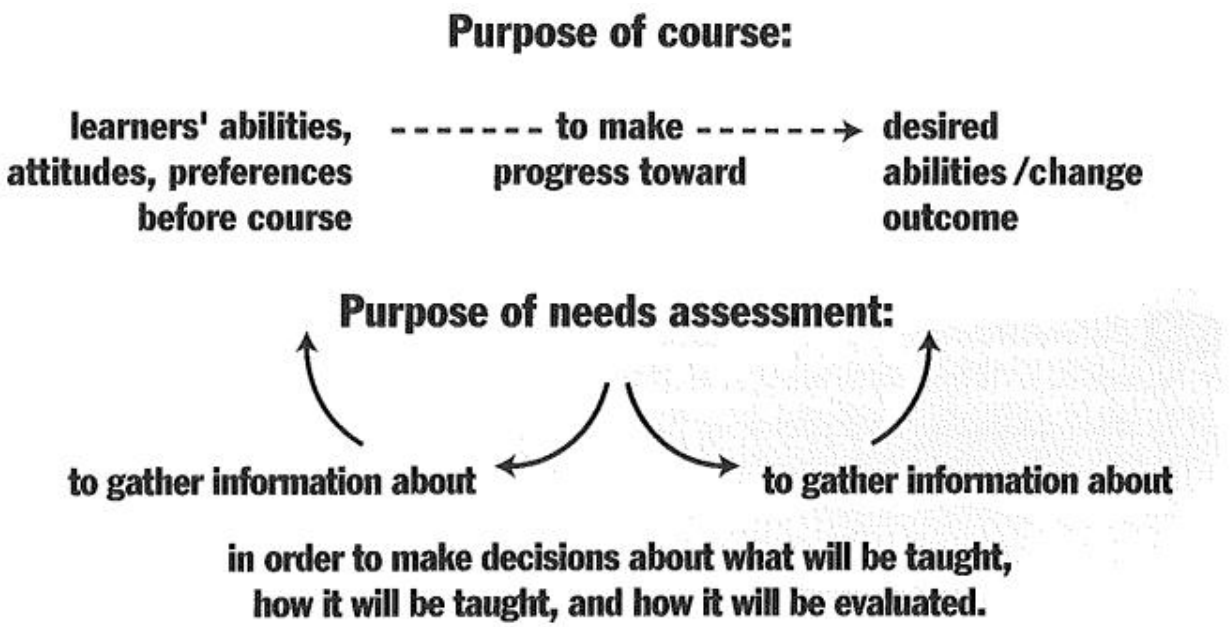

**Needs Assessment Cycle**

The view of needs assessment as a process of gathering information and interpreting it is very close to Kathi Bailey's definition of assessment in her book in this series, *Learning About Language Assessment* (1998, p.2). She writes, "The main purpose of language assessment is to help us gain the information we need about our students' abilities and to do so in a manner that is appropriate, consistent, and conducive to learning." Needs assessment and language assessment overlap when needs assessment is concerned with assessment of language ability, as in assessing proficiency at the start of a course, or when diagnosing language needs as part of ongoing needs assessment. Needs assessment also overlaps with course evaluation when it gathers information about how the way the course has been designed and is being conducted is or is not meeting the needs of the students so that unmet needs can be addressed. In Chapter 10, we will focus on designing an overall assessment plan for the course, which includes needs assessment, assessment of learning, and course evaluation.

## III-WHAT AREAS OF LEARNING DOES NEEDS ASSESSMENT ADDRESS?

the first step is deciding what information to gather. When designing and teaching a course to meet students' needs, we assume that there is a gap to be bridged between a current state and a desired one, or progress to be made toward a desired goal, or a change to be made.

The purpose of the course is to bridge the gap or some part of it, to help students make progress or to effect the desired change. For a course to meet learners' needs it is necessary to gather information about both the current state of the learners, where they stand in terms of language ability, learning preferences, and the desired goals or change, and where they would like to be or what they want to achieve, change, and so on. The cycle in the Figure below can be repeated throughout the course at various times, depending on what you-and the learners-want to know.




**Basic Purpose of Needs Assessment**

**Practice**

*What information could you gather about your learners prior to or at the beginning of the course? What information could you gather about the desired learning or improvement the course is supposed to bring about? Who can you gather the information from?*

**IV-Types of Information that Can Be Gathered when Assessing Needs**

We can gather information about:
**The present:**

1. Who the learners are
2. The learners' level of language proficiency
3. The learners' level of intercultural competence
4. Their interests
5. Their learning preferences
6. Their attitudes

**The future**:

7. The learners' [or others involved] goals and expectations
8. The target contexts: situations, roles, topics, and content
9. Types of communicative skills they will need and tasks they will perform.
10. Language modalities they will use

After reading about each type of information, make a preliminary list of the information you feel you would like to gather for the course you are designing.

**V-Information about the present**

**1. Who the learners are**

What is their age, gender, educational background, profession, nationality? Is it a multicultural or single culture group? What languages do they speak?

This information can help provide the background for the remaining questions; for example, we will ask for or interpret information differently if the students are children or adults, literate in their first language or not, of mixed nationality or of one nationality.

**2. The learners' level of language proficiency**

What is their level of proficiency in each of the four skills in the target language-speaking, listening, reading, writing? With respect to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functional skills? Are they literate in their own language?

This information can help to make choices about the kinds of texts to use, which skills to develop, which elements of grammar to emphasize and so on.

**3. The learners' level of intercultural competence**

What is their experience in the target or in other cultures? What is their level of understanding and skills with respect to sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects of the target language and differences with their own language?

This information can help to make choices about the kind of material to use, and the sociolinguistic and sociocultural skills to develop and emphasize.

**4. Their interests**

What topics or issues are they interested in? What kinds of personal and professional experience do they bring?

This information can help teachers to gear the course toward students' experience and interests. In the absence of specific target needs (see #8 and #9 below), it can help teachers design the course around topics that will engage the learners.

**5. Their learning preferences**

How do the learners expect to be taught and tested? How do they prefer to learn? How well do they work in groups? What role do they expect the teacher to take? What roles do they expect to take?

This information can help teachers to know whether the learners will be comfortable with certain kinds of activities, or will need to be taught how to do them; for example, how to work cooperatively with each other. It will help to know how to set up activities, or what kinds of bridges will need to be built between students' expectations of how they should learn and the teacher's approach and beliefs.

**6. Their attitudes**

What is their attitude toward themselves as learners? What is their attitude toward the target language and culture?

This information can help teachers to know whether the learners feel confident about using the target language, are comfortable with making mistakes, feel positive about being in the classroom.

**VI-Information about what the learners need to learn, want to change**

7. The learners' [or others' involved] goals and expectations

Why are they taking the course? What are their goals? What do they expect to learn?

This information can help to shape goals and also to alert learners to what is realistic within the constraints of the course.

8. The target contexts: situations, roles, topics, and content

In what situations will they use English beyond the classroom? Who will they use English with? What topics will they need to be able to communicate about or what content will

they need to know? For example, if they are university students, will they be in lectures, seminars, dormitories? If they are business people, with whom will they transact business and about what? If they are immigrants, where and with whom will they use the target language?

**9. Types of communicative skills they need and tasks they will perform**

For what purposes are they using the language? Will they need to understand
and give directions? Will they need to give and get information on the telephone? Will they be listening to lectures? Will they need to persuade clients?
Will they be talking to their children's teachers?

**10. Language modalities they will use**

Do they need to speak, read, listen, and/or write in the target language?

The areas outlined above will yield both objective information about the students and subjective information ( Brindley 1989, Nunan 1988). Objective information includes facts about who the learners are, their language ability, and what they need the language for. Subjective information includes attitudes and expectations the learners have with respect to what and how they will learn. Subjective information is important because if you don't take it into account, the objective information may be useless. For example, if your learners are expecting you to stand at the front of the class and answer their questions, and you put them in small groups and ask them to find their own answers, they may feel very uncomfortable in your classroom and unable or unwilling to learn in that wayat least initially-regardless of how appropriate the content is. Or, if your students have expectations that they will make a vast improvement in a short period of time, and your course has more modest goals, you will need to help them reach more realistic expectations.

**VII-SOME FACTORS THAT CAN GUIDE YOUR CHOICES**

**The purpose of the course**. It is important to gather information that is relevant to the purpose(s) of the course. An assessment of students' writing skills would not be a priority in a course whose purpose was to improve their oral skills. If you know that students don't have immediate needs for the L2 outside of the classroom, as was the case with the Japanese housewives I taught, then assessing the target contexts could be confusing to them. One teacher, Kay Alcorn, describes how she changed the focus of her needs assessment because she realized it would not give her information pertinent to the course she was teaching. Her course was for Mexican students studying English for the tourism industry. In her original needs assessment she had listed such questions as "What past experience has taught you an important life lesson? What did it teach you?" "Describe your favorite place. What do you do there? How does it make you feel?" and "Who do you admire? Why? Would you like to be more like this person?"

She writes:

> The questions that I formulated were intended to be on a handout which students could draw from all semester and answer in their dialogue journal. I intended to introduce it approximately 3 weeks into the semester once students were comfortable communicating with me. After much reflection I realized that what I was after was self serving and really had no relation to teaching English for the tourism industry. I realized I needed to find ways to know my students better through other means that were much more pertinent to the subject matter and goals for the course.

**Your beliefs.** For example, if you believe that language is learned through interaction, then you will probably want to assess students' learning styles and attitudes in order to know how skilled or disposed they are to working in groups.

**Information you already have about the students.** For example, students may have already provided a writing sample for a placement test or you may already have information about the target contexts and communicative skills they will need. In such cases, you don't need to reinvent the wheel unless you need more specific information about the type of writing they can do or about the types of writing they need to learn.

Finally, you should only gather information that you know you can use. I have seen teachers get excited about the idea that needs assessment can help them learn about their students' needs and tailor the course to those needs. They then try to get too much information in too short a time and are overwhelmed with the data and unsure of what to do with it. For that reason, it makes sense to choose only a few types of information initially and to learn how to use it effectively so that your students see the value in it. This will help you to build the trust that Jeri Manning mentions at the beginning of the chapter. Below, we will look at two different needs assessment plans, one for a writing course and one for an adult education course. Each teacher made different choices about what to assess based on who the students were, the type of course, and her or his beliefs. The first is Denise Lawson's needs assessment plan for her advanced composition class at a university extension program in the United States.

**Practice :**

***Which of the ten areas in the last figure did Denise choose to focus on? What appeals to you about Denise's needs assessment plan? What doesn't appeal to you? Why?***

## VIII-WHEN SHOULD ONE Do NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

There are three time frames for gathering information: pre-course, initial, and ongoing. They are complementary, not exclusive.

**Pre-course needs assessment** takes place prior to the start of the course and can inform decisions about content, goals and objectives, activities, and choice of materials.

Generally, assessment activities that determine placement are done at the program level so that students can be placed in the right course at the right level. Pre-course needs assessment activities may be diagnostic and help to pinpoint specific areas of strengths and weaknesses and thus help to determine what needs to be addressed in a given course. They may gather information about learners' target needs and thus help determine the content of the course, which language items, skills, etc. will be taught; as well as which materials and texts should be used. They may gather information about students' learning needs and thus help determine what kinds of activities will be used. Teachers who are able to gather information prior to teaching a course can use it to plan the course so that it is responsive to students' needs right from the first day of class. In many cases, however, teachers do not meet their students prior to teaching them, and so must rely on initial and ongoing needs assessment to allow them to be responsive to their learners' needs.

**Initial needs assessment** takes place during the initial stage of a course, the first few sessions, the first week or weeks, depending on the time frame of the course. The kinds of information gathered prior to teaching a course can also be gathered during the first few class sessions.

**Ongoing needs assessment** takes place throughout the course. One advantage of ongoing needs assessment is that it is grounded in shared experiences and thus can be focused on changing the course as it progresses. It helps to determine whether what is being taught, how it is being taught, and how it is being evaluated, are effective for the students. You may need to change or djust the content, the materials, and the objectives, depending on what you find out in ongoing needs assessment. Students are asked to reflect on something they have done, and to base their assessment and suggestions on these concrete experiences. For example, questions about how students learn may be easier to answer once they have a variety of learning experiences to reflect on. In order for ongoing assessment to work, however, it must be geared toward those aspects of teaching you can change. An advantage of both initial and ongoing needs assessment is that they are done once the class has started and so you can do both a direct needs assessment, in which the focus of the activity is on gathering specific information, or an indirect needs assessment, in which a "regular" teaching activity is given a needs analysis focus. Or you can do an

informal needs assessment, in which you simply observe-but carefully and conscientiously-the students.

**Practice**

*Is it feasible for you to gather pre-course information? Using your list from Investigation 6.8 do a mind map of the types of information you can envision getting in pre-course, initial and ongoing needs assessment* .

## IX- WAYS OF DOING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

At the beginning of the chapter I raised the following question about the "how" of needs assessment: How can teachers do needs assessment in ways that students understand, that are a good use of students' and the teacher's time, and that give teachers information that allows them to be responsive to students' needs? John Kongsvik describes his dilemmas with these questions in his experience with initial needs assessment for a course for beginners at the University of Queretaro in Mexico:

Before teaching at the University of Queretaro, I planned the initial needs assessment I would use at the beginning of the course. I knew the length of the course was short, 30 hours, and wanted to get as much information about each participant as quickly as I could. I decided to split the assessment into three sections: a written questionnaire, an oral interview, and a class activity.j

My primary purpose in using the questionnaire was to get some background information on each of the students. I questioned whether to write it in English or both English and Spanish. I opted for the former, concluding that the students could help one another if needed.

I also asked them to write as much as they could in English about the following: What did you do today? What are you going to do this weekend? I explained this process to the entire student body and then began interviewing students one by one.

I knew that I could not spend a large amount of time speaking to each student and decided that three minutes would be ample. I used a grid to record the results of the interview. After all the interviews were completed, we began the final activity.

We performed an activity using introductions that had them work individually as well as in groups. This, I thought, would give me an idea of both the proficiency level of each student as well as the group dynamics. The class ended just as we finished, and as the students walked out the door, I reflected on what had happened.

The questionnaires, I noted, were of little value. Most of the questions had not been answered and the ones that were, offered one or two word responses. Even though I saw students explaining the task to others, the information sought was absent. Should it have been in Spanish and English? After all, with the exception of two short answer questions, I was interested in getting background information on them. Should I have explained it better or gone over it with them, making that into a lesson in and of itself? What kind of feelings did I evoke by shoving a questionnaire in each student's face the second they entered the classroom? Furthermore, my oral interviews had been constantly interrupted by new arrivals and questions from confused students.

The second part of the assessment was particularly fruitful.

Within a minute, I was able to get a feel for each individual's level. Unfortunately, it was difficult to record specifics about each person, and, after sixteen interviews, I could scarcely remember all that I wanted. I realized I should have recorded it on video or audio. It would have served as a better assessment tool and could have been used to check progress throughout the course. I'm not sure how that would have affected student performance, but I'm sure I could have explained its purpose well enough to assuage negative feelings.

The final part was perhaps the most successful. With an even greater ease, I could discern who had no or little English and who had had prior instruction. I also could see how each participant interacted in small and large group settings. It was also the most satisfying and comfortable activity we did that day. It made me think of how I could use this type of assessment tool to get a better idea of what the students wanted and needed.

The statement, a teacher is most prepared to teach a class after it has been taught, is equally valid for needs assessment. Were I to do it again, I would structure it differently. For one thing, I think I was trying to get too much information too fast. I was more concerned with the end product than the process, which affected the benefits of the assessment.

It would have been better to initially focus on the students' oral proficiency and their comfort level in group activities. I also felt the need to have everyone (including myself) introduce themselves. This would also have given me information on who they are as people, for example, what they like to do, how they see themselves. Even without a lot of language, using visual posters could be the language vehicle. A written assignment could be given in class or for homework such as, " Write a letter to me in English or Spanish telling me why you want to learn English." I could devote the following day to discerning individual learning styles. I could also use that day to learn what they want to learn. By the third day, we would be comfortable enough with one another to video (or audio) tape an activity for long and short term assessment.

**Practice :** ***What did John learn about how to get information in ways the students could understand, that would be a good use of class time, and that would be useful to him in analyzing their needs?***

A Framework for Designing Needs Assessment Activities

1. What information does it gather?
2. Who is involved and why?
3. What skills are necessary to carry it out? Is preparation needed? In other words, are the students familiar with this type of activity or do they have to be taught how to do it?
4. Is the activity feasible given the level and number of your students? How could you adapt it?
5. Is the activity focused only on gathering information which you will analyze or does it also ask students to
    - identify problems and solutions?
    - identify priorities?
6. How will the teacher and learners use this information?

**Practice**

***Use the questions above to analyze the needs assessment activities that follow.***

**X-Needs assessment activities that can be used once or on a regular basis.**

**1. Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are an obvious choice for needs assessment, but not always the most effective, depending on when they are given and how well the learners understand the kind of information that is sought. The advantage of questionnaires is that you can tailor the questions for your particular group. The disadvantages are that teachers sometimes go overboard with questions, students are not sure what the "right answer" is, or they don't have the language to answer them. For example, in an effort to find out what kinds of learning activities students prefer, if "role plays" are on the list, and the students have never heard of a role play, the teacher will not get the information he seeks. For this reason I suggest that questionnaires about ways of learning be given after the students have experienced different ways of working in the class so that their answers are grounded in experience.

Cyndy Thatcher-Fettig gave the following questionnaire to her students in the Intensive English Program (IEP) at Cornell University. The questionnaire was filled out individually by students, handed in to her, and then used as a basis for an individual interview, described below.


**Cyndy Thatcher-Fettig**

**I General Questions**

1. Name _____
2. Address in Ithaca _____
3. Phone number in Ithaca _____
4. Nationality _____
5. Other foreign language learning experience _____
6. Have you been to the U.S. before? Why? How long? When?_____
7. Purpose for taking this course: _____
8. In what setting will you need English? _____
9. Length of stay (from now): _____
10. Future goals: _____

**II English Language Study Questions:**

1. Have you taken an English conversation course before? If yes, where and for how long? _____
2. What specific points of the English language do you want to improve?
   - *a. speaking skills (conversation, discussion, presentations, _____)*
   - *b. listening skills (TV, radio, lectures, service people, _____)*
   - *c. reading skills (newspaper, magazine, textbooks, books, _____)*
   - *d. writing skills (papers, professional letters, stories, _____)*
   - *e. practical situations (greetings, telephone, restaurant, _____)*
   - *f. grammatical skills _____*
   - *g. idiomatic expressions _____*
   - *h. other (please explain) _____*
3. Present TOEFL score: _____ needed TOEFL score: _____
4. Comments _____

**Practice**

***What do you find useful about Cyndy's questionnaire? Why? What don't you find useful? Why? How might you adapt it to your context?***

## 2. Interviews

Interviews can take different forms: the teacher interviewing the student(s), or the students interviewing each other, or the students interviewing the teacher. Cyndy Thatcher-Fettig followed up her questionnaire above, for use in her IEP speaking/listening class, with a series of interviews or conferences with individual students.

### First Week Conferences

The first week of school I set up student conferences. I like to individually speak with each student and get a better feel for their English proficiency level in speaking and listening. The manner is casual, friendly, and I try to make them feel as comfortable as possible. I go over the information sheet [above] they handed in to me on the first day of class and we talk about the information they wrote in more detail. I like to ask them about their housing situation to make sure that they have a place to stay and that they are settled. I also get more information on what they were doing before coming to our program so that I am better able to understand what kind of acculturation stage they may be going through. I make sure that they feel they are placed properly in my class as well as other classes, and I assure them that they should feel free to come to me if they have any problems. I also explain that we will have this type of student conference a few times during the semester. Before they leave, I hand the students a learning style survey for them to do in preparation for our second conference

### Round Two Conferences

I set up my second conferences around the beginning of the third week. We review the "learning style survey" and talk about their findings about their personal learning style. We also discuss the questions that I had given them in the first conference. In addition to getting information about their learning styles and attitudes about learning English, I use this second conference to try to get some kind of commitment-possibly in written form-from the students on the effort they are going to put forth in learning English inside *and* outside of class.... I believe in getting students to take on more responsibility for their own learning. Talking about ways to do that and getting a written commitment helps them

realize how important it is for them to get out of the traditional "back seat" of learning. Conferences early on and throughout the semester help build that awareness

**Practice**

What appeals to you about the way Cyndy uses conferencing? Why? What doesn't appeal to you? Why not? How might you adapt this type of activity to your context?

**3. Grids, charts, or lists.**

One activity I have used is to have students interview each other and then fill in a class grid or chart with information about their partner's background, interests, profession, and so on. A grid can also be used to get other kinds of information such as students' target needs and learning preferences.

**5. Writing activities**

Writing activities can serve a variety of purposes for needs assessment. They can help to assess proficiency or diagnose strengths and weaknesses. They can also help to gather information about students' objective and subjective needs, depending on how the activity is focused. One teacher, Wagner Veillard, changed his initial writing assignment, in an ESL class in an international school in Sao Paulo, from the usual "What I did during my summer vacation" to one which gave him information about his students' expectations for the course:

Write a letter to a friend telling him or her that you have just started a new school year.
Be sure to mention:
a) your expectations regarding this year, this semester,
or the first day of classes
b) the classes you will be taking
c) your reasons for taking this course (ESL Writing)
You may include any other information if you wish, but be sure to address the three points mentioned above.

Exchange letters. As you read, look for similarities and differences. In groups, come up with a list of reasons for taking this course.

### 6. Group discussions

Discussions can be used as a way for the group to address some of the areas related to needs. An advantage of discussions is that they allow students to hear different points of view and allow the teacher to watch how individual students participate. A disadvantage is that those who are reluctant to participate may not have their views heard.

My colleague, Paul LeVassem; used this activity on the first day of class during the years he taught in an Intensive English Program:

**Teacher and Student Responsibilities**

Teacher and students: individually write out what you think are the responsibilities of the teacher and of the students.

Make a list of responses on sheets of paper or on board, one for teacher responsibilities, one for students.

Discuss responses and agreements and disagreements.

**6. Ranking activities**

An example of a ranking activity is to ask students to list where and for what purpose they use English outside of the classroom and to rank them from the most important to the least important.

## XII-Ongoing needs assessment activities

Ongoing needs assessment activities follow the basic needs assessment cycle: gather information about where the learners are and where they need to or would like to be, interpret that information, act on it and evaluate it. Ongoing needs assessment may take place through careful observation of the students as they learn; based on that observation, you can make decisions to adjust how to structure their learning. Such observation and adjustments are the foundation of good teaching because they require the learners to be engaged in learning in order for the teacher to have something to observe and assess. The

type of ongoing needs assessment activities described below, however, explicitly ask learners to reflect on and assess their learning on a regular basis throughout the course.

1. **Regular feedback sessions**

   Regular feedback sessions offer the opportunity for learners to reflect on the class up to that point and to express their views about what has been productive and what hasn't with respect to their needs as learners. One of the challenges of this type of assessment is to focus it on the learning so that learners do not perceive it as an evaluation of the teacher's performance. These feedback sessions are like an oral version of learning logs, which are described in #3 below, except that they are done with the whole class. Here is how Dylan Bate outlines his plan for doing such reviews with university students in China:

First, I elicit from the students the activities we have done that week, going into enough detail so that everyone clearly recalls the activity and its procedure. I list these on the blackboard in chronological order. Next, I write up two or three questions for students to rate/assess them with. For example:

1. How valuable was this activity in helping you with __?
(e.g., pronunciation, listening)
2. What did we, or you, do that made it helpful?
3. What would you change next time?

These could change to address certain specific issues/subjects depending on what the class has done that week or where I want to draw their attention, or they can be varied depending on how familiar/comfortable the class is with the feedback process: starting with concrete, specific questions initially, and moving toward more open ended questions as students become familiar with and skilled at giving feedback.

Students' familiarity with giving feedback would be a factor in whether or not I launch into this with the class as a whole orally or follow a more roundabout route. For instance, since I expect that my Chinese students will not be familiar or

comfortable with giving feedback, especially as individuals, I will probably start by having them discuss these questions in pairs, then small groups, and finally have them report to the whole class their findings. This way I may be able to depersonalize it sufficiently to get some good, informative feedback.

**2. Dialogue journals**

Students write regularly (e.g., weekly) in a journal which the teacher responds to. The journal content can be structured or unstructured.

**3. Learning logs or learning diaries**

Learning logs are records kept by the students about what they are learning, where they feel they are making progress, and what they plan to do to continue making progress.

The following is excerpted from Collaborations, a series for adult immigrants developed by Huizenga and Weinstein-Shr (1994).

*Language Learning Diary*

A. This week I learned ___

B. This week I spoke English to ___

C. This week I read ____

D. My new words are ____

E. Next week I want to learn ____

F. Outside of the classroom, I would like to try ____

When using learning logs or diaries, it is important for students to have a clear focus for what they are to write about, at least initially. Once they are comfortable using them, students can take the initiative in deciding what to write about.

**4. Portfolios**

Portfolios are collections of students' work, selected according to certain criteria, to show progress and achievement.

**Lecture Nine :Organising The Course**

**Aim : to impart knowledge and skills to the participants. A well-organized course ensures that the learning objectives are clearly defined and met.**

**Warming Up:**

Choose a language course you have taught recently or one in which you were a learner. Write a few descriptive comments about the course syllabus: what it focused on, how it was organized and sequenced, and why it was organized that way.

Organizing a course is a multifaceted endeavor that requires careful planning, clear objectives, and a deep understanding of the subject matter. It is not merely about delivering content but about creating an engaging and effective learning experience for participants. A well-organized course can inspire and motivate learners, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the topic. This essay explores the essential elements of course organization, including setting educational goals, structuring content, and utilizing effective teaching methods. By examining these components, we can gain insights into how to design a course that not only imparts knowledge but also encourages active participation and critical thinking.

## I-WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ORGANIZE A COURSE?

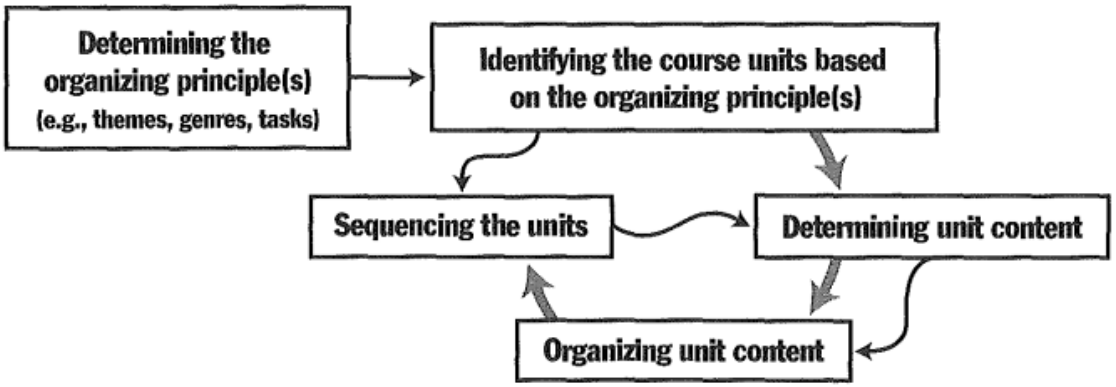
Organizing a course is deciding what the underlying systems will be that pull together the content and material in accordance with the goals and objectives and that give the course a shape and structure. Organizing a course occurs on different levels: the level of the course as a whole; the level of subsets of the whole: units, modules, or strands within the course; and then individual lessons. In this lecture we will focus on the first two levels: how to organize the course as a whole, and how to organize subsets of the whole.

The product of organizing and sequencing a course is a syllabus. The syllabus may take a variety of forms, depending on how you plan to use it. Most syllabuses that are given to students contain a chronological list or chart of what the course will cover. If it is a document that only you will use, then it could also take the form of a map or a diagram. We will look at four different syllabuses and one syllabus unit in this lecture.

Organizing a course involves five overlapping processes: 1) determining the organizing principle(s) that drive(s) the course; 2) identifying units, modules, or strands based on the organizing principle(s); 3) sequencing the units; 4) determining the language and skills content of the units; 5) organizing the content

within each unit. We will look at each of these aspects in this chapter. The processes do not follow a specific order; you may work on the content and organization of a unit or strand before deciding how to sequence the units over the course as a whole; you may also decide the sequence of the modules or units once the course is underway. The five processes or aspects are captured in a flow chart below:

**II-Five Aspects of Organising a Course**




**III-WHY ORGANIZE A COURSE?**

For some teachers the question *Why organize the course?* will seem inappropriate, even ludicrous. Of course you have to have some idea of the organization and sequencing of your course, or how will you know how the course fits together and is sequenced in such a way that students will learn? But for teachers who are considering some form of process syllabus in which they negotiate some or all of the syllabus with their students, this question is important to ask.

**How DOES ONE DECIDE ON AN APPROPRIATE ORGANIZATION?**

The way you organize your course depends on a number of factors which include the course content, your goals and objectives, your past experience, your students' needs, your beliefs and understandings, the method or text, and the context.

The way you have conceptualized the content and defined the goals and objectives of the course provides the foundation for organizing the course. For example, courses that focus on writing skills are often organized around types of composition (e.g., narrative, argument). A course in which the four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated may be organized around themes; a content-based history course may be organized chronologically around historical periods or around historical themes. A task-based course may be organized around a series of cumulative tasks. See Chapter 4, Conceptualizing Content, for other examples of the content around which a syllabus can be organized.

The way that you conceptualize content and set goals and objectives depends on your teaching (and learning) experience in general, and of this kind of course in particular; what you understand about how people learn languages; and the students' needs, or what you know about their needs. For example, if your students are children, you may choose to organize your course around themes rather than linguistic skills. If your students are business personnel, you may choose to organize your course around the types of tasks they perform. Your experience allows you to build on what you have found effective in the past.

Your beliefs about how learners learn also play an important role. For example, beliefs about the importance of learner autonomy may lead you to organize your course around learner projects. Beliefs about the role of learner's experience may lead you to organize your course around learners' stories (Wrigley and Guth 1992).

If you adopt a particular approach or method, you may organize the course around certain material or procedures. For example, the Community Language Learning Approach uses student generated material as the core "text" for the course (Rardin and Tranel1988). An existing syllabus or textbook may provide the organizational structure for a course. It may be possible to reshape the syllabus, depending on the institutional givens.

The teaching context also plays a crucial role. If your course is part of an institutional curriculum, the course organization may, to some extent, be predetermined. Your decisions about organization may occur more at the unit and lesson level than at the course level. Time is also an important contextual factor. For example, the amount of time for the course, how often the course meets, and over what period will help to determine the number and length of your teaching units or modules, or how many strands you can follow. If there is an examination schedule, you will need to organize the course to meet the exam requirements.

## IV-WHAT ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO ORGANIZE AND SEQUENCE A COURSE?

Organizing and sequencing a course effectively can greatly enhance the learning experience. Here are some different ways to do it:

1. **Chronological Order**: Arrange the content in the order in which events or concepts occurred or should be learned. This is useful for subjects like history or process-based learning.
2. **Thematic Organization**: Group content by themes or topics. This approach is beneficial for subjects that can be divided into distinct themes, such as literature or social sciences.
3. **Modular Structure**: Divide the course into self-contained modules, each focusing on a specific topic or skill. This allows for flexibility and makes it easier for learners to digest the material.
4. **Spiral Curriculum**: Introduce basic concepts first and revisit them in more detail later. This approach helps reinforce learning and build on prior knowledge.
5. **Problem-Based Learning**: Organize the course around real-world problems that students need to solve. This method encourages critical thinking and application of knowledge.

6. **Project-Based Learning**: Structure the course around projects that students work on over time. This approach promotes hands-on learning and practical application of skills.
7. **Flipped Classroom**: Provide instructional content (e.g., videos, readings) for students to review before class, and use class time for interactive activities and discussions. This method encourages active learning and engagement.
8. **Sequential Learning**: Arrange content in a logical sequence where each lesson builds on the previous one. This is effective for subjects that require a step-by-step understanding, such as mathematics or language learning.
9. **Competency-Based Learning**: Organize the course around specific competencies or skills that students need to master. This approach allows for personalized learning and progress at an individual pace.
10. **Blended Learning**: Combine online and face-to-face instruction. This hybrid approach can provide flexibility and cater to different learning styles

**V-Example syllabuses**

Below we will look at two syllabuses for two very different contexts, a high school Spanish course and an ESP course for scientists.

**Practice**

**Study the following two syllabuses and answer the questions:**

1. On what basis did each teacher organize her course: What was the organizing principle or focus for each unit? On what basis are units sequenced?
2. What do you like about the way the teacher organized her course?

Why? What don't you like? Why not?

4. Why are they so different?

The first syllabus is for Denise Maksail-Fine's high school Spanish 3 course. The course is a year long (36 weeks), so only the first twelve weeks are included in the figure below :

The First Twelve Weeks of Denise Maksaii-Fine's Year-long (36 week) Syllabus for her Spanish 3 Course

Spanish 3

| | |
|---|---|
| Week 1: ***Personal Identification*** | Week 2: ***Personal Identification*** |
| (Sept) Biographical Data<br>Introductions, Greetings,<br>Leave-taking, Common Courtesy<br>Review: Present tense verbs | (Sept) Physical Characteristics<br>Psychological Characteristics<br>Review: Present tense verbs |
| Week 3: ***Family Life*** | Week 4: ***Family Life*** |
| (Sept) Family Members<br>Family Activities<br>*Cultural Awareness:*<br>*Día de Independencia (Mexico)*<br>Review: Noun-adjective agreement, articles | (Sept) Roles and Responsibilities<br>*Cultural Awareness:*<br>*Hispanic vs. USA Families*<br>Review: Noun-adjective agreement, articles |
| Week 5: ***House and Home*** | Week 6: ***House and Home*** |
| (Oct) Types of Lodging<br>Review: Prepositions | (Oct) Rooms, Furnishings, Appliances<br>Review: Prepositions |
| Week 7: ***House and Home*** | Week 8: ***Services and Repairs*** |
| Routine Household Chores<br>*Cultural Awareness:*<br>*Día de la Raza*<br>Review: Imperative | Repairs and Household Goods<br>Review: Imperative |
| Week 9: ***Community and Neighborhood*** | Week 10: ***Private and Public Services*** |
| Local Stores, Facilities<br>Recreational Opportunities<br>*Cultural Awareness:*<br>*Día de los Muertos*<br>Review: Imperative | Communications:<br>Telephone, Mail, E-Mail<br>Review: Imperative |
| Week 11: ***Private and Public Services*** | Week 12: ***Private and Public Services*** |
| (Nov) Government Agencies:<br>Post Office, Customs,<br>Police, Embassies<br>Review: Imperative | Finances: Banks,<br>Currency Exchange |

The second syllabus was developed by Brooke Palmer for an ESP course for scientists. The course is 12 weeks long and meets twice a week for a total of 48 hours.

**Brooke Palmer's Syllabus for an ESP Course for Professionals in the Sciences**

Week 1: Introduction to ESP; Presentation Skills Workshop
Week 2: Amplified definitions
Week 3: Description of a mechanism
Week 4: Description of a process
Week 5: Classification
Week 6: Abstract writing
Week 7: Research reports
Week 8: Research reports
Week 9: Peer editing of research reports
Week 10: "Mini conference"—Presentations of research reports
Week 11: "Mini conference"—Presentations and peer evaluations
Week 12: Self evaluations and video evaluations of presentations

How are the courses above organized? Denise Maksail Fine's Spanish course is organized around topics. Thus topics are the organizing principle of the course. Each topic is the focus of a unit that lasts two to three weeks. Within each unit, students learn about aspects of the topic. For example, in the second unit, Family Life, which is two weeks long, students learn to talk and write about family members, family activities, and family roles and responsibilities.

In this syllabus, grammar takes a supporting role, and is introduced in relation to the topic. Another element is culture, which is also linked to the particular topic. In the unit on Family Life, students explore similarities and differences between families in the

United States and families in Mexico and Spanish-speaking countries in South America. Other elements will be included in each unit, such as work on the four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which we know from Denise's goals and objectives; however, these are not specified in the syllabus.

Determining the organizing principle, which in turn provides the basis for the syllabus units or modules, which in turn are sequenced in a certain way. The topics in the Spanish course are sequenced so that they follow a progression from the individual to the home to the community and beyond. The ESP course follows a progression from simpler writing texts/tasks to more complex writing texts/tasks, each building on the preceding one. The fourth and fifth aspects of organizing a course, unit content and organization, are not evident, or only partially evident, in their syllabus documents.

In Brooke Palmer's course, the organizing principle is not topics, but texts, specifically scientific texts, which she calls "technical writing products." These include amplified definitions, describing a mechanism, describing a process, and so on. The main focus is on being able to write each of those kinds of text. The course culminates in a "mini conference" in which the students present their final paper, a research report, to each other. The six types of text are the basis for the course units which span twelve weeks. The first week and the last three weeks address presentation skills. Speaking, reading, and listening are also included as part of the units, although that is not apparent from the syllabus list above.

**Practice**

***Study the following two syllabuses.***

1. On what basis did each teacher organize her course:
    - What was the organizing principle or focus for each unit?
    - Within a unit, what are the language learning components?

For example, vocabulary, grammar, four skills, communicative skills, cultural skills, etc.

- Within a unit, how are the language learning components organized?

2. What do you like about the way the teacher organized her course?

Why? What don't you like? Why not?

3. What are the similarities and differences between them?

The first syllabus is Toby Brody's, for an eight-week course for high-intermediate to advanced level pre-university students from different cultures. The course takes place in an intensive English program in the United States, and meets for 2 hours daily. It uses the local newspaper as the core text for the course.

> Toby has called it an integrated skills course because it integrates work on the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. She chose the newspaper as the text for her course for several reasons. Newspapers are a genre that students are familiar with, since newspapers exist in every culture. Newspapers report current events and reactions to the events as they occur and so are a means to connect students to the larger world. The newspaper also reports on sports, the arts, business, and local news and the community. Newspapers are cultural products and so provide insights into the target culture. She writes:

> > The adaptability of the newspaper to academics gives this material grounding as a versatile resource. When I began to consider the skills pre-university students would need to hone, tasks emerged which reflected the richness and variety contained in the newspaper. University-level courses, generally, challenge students' abilities in expository writing, summarizing, arguing a point, and researching provocative questions, for example. The newspaper is a huge stock of information placed into a user-friendly, accessible format and, as such is a practical resource for students to tap. I

believe that every student can find something of interest to explore, given the multidimensional nature of the paper.

The first four weeks of the syllabus are shown below.

| Week 1 | | Week 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Introduction:* Newspaper scavenger hunt | | | |
| *Focus:* | Summarizing | *Focus:* | Objective reporting |
| *Tasks:* | Scanning for 5 W's and H Questions<br>Predicting main ideas from headlines<br>Reading for main ideas Answering comprehension questions<br>Listening for main ideas —Short News Report<br>Oral and written summaries | *Tasks:* | Reconstructing a strip story<br>Following and reconstructing a developing story<br>Reading first part of an article that "jumps" and creating an ending<br>Sequencing a radio news report |
| *Linguistic Focus:* | Forming questions | *Linguistic Focus:* | Transitions and adverbial connectors |
| *Culture Focus:* | Asking colloquial questions (e.g., What's up?) | *Culture Focus:* | Formats of newspapers and radio broadcasts |
| **Week 2** | | **Week 4** | |
| *Focus:* | Interviewing | *Focus:* | Proposing Solutions |
| *Tasks:* | Predicting main ideas from headlines<br>Skimming and scanning<br>Reading and role-playing an interview article<br>Interviewing students with "interview cards"<br>Writing feature story based on interview<br>Interviewing a native speaker<br>Reporting orally on interview with a native speaker | *Tasks:* | Reading about and summarizing community problems<br>Researching community problems<br>Reporting on community problems and describing action to be taken<br>Creating a visual to capture a problem and its solution<br>Presenting a synopsis of the visual |
| *Linguistic Focus:* | Review questions Student-generated structures | *Linguistic Focus:* | Conditionals |
| *Culture Focus*: | Interview a native speaker re a culture question | *Culture Focus:* | Connecting community problems to local realities |

The second syllabus was designed by Valarie Barnes for a four week holiday (or vacation) course for young adults. It takes place in the United States, although it was designed based on her experience with such courses in both Singapore and the United States. The students have classes in the morning and afternoon. Valarie knew from experience that these young people were not interested in devoting their holiday to the study of grammar or academic skills, so she designed the course so that students would need to actively use the language they had learned more formally at school. She also designed it to take advantage of their curiosity about the environment and to introduce them to an exploration of their own cultures in light of the target culture.

Toby Brody has organized her course around what she calls "pre-university skills" or skills that the students will need to master in order to do well in university. Each skill is the focus of the unit and is labeled as such. The skills for the first four units are *summarizing, interviewing, objective reporting* and *proposing solutions.* Each unit is a week long. The supporting components she has labeled tasks, linguistic focus and culture focus. Within a unit, each sequence of tasks develops the language and skills needed to be able to master the focus skill. For example, the focus skill of week 2 is to be able to conduct an interview. Students learn to read an article based on an interview and then role-play the interview. They then interview fellow students using questions provided on interview cards and write a newspaper story based on the interview. Finally, they interview a native speaker about a cultural question and report to the class what they learned in the interview. The grammar focuses on reviewing questions that are used in interviews as well as grammar points the students choose. The cultural aspect is the basis for the interview of a native speaker. The eight week course culminates in the final week, when the students produce their own newspaper. As the course progresses, the tasks associated with the focus skill place more complex demands on the students' language and thinking abilities.

The organizing principle for Valarie Barnes' course is quite different from Toby's. Her course is organized around theme-related field trips. Each module is a week long and follows something of a predictable sequence or cycle of activities: prepare for the field trip, take the field trip, learn from the field trip. The preparation for the field trip weaves together work on the vocabulary and the communicative and cultural skills the students will need. During the field trip they each have language- and culture-based tasks to perform. For example, during the field trip to the shopping mall, their tasks include going into certain stores to find out whether they carry certain merchandise or give student discounts as well as interviewing shoppers about their views on the difference between shopping at the mall and shopping in downtown stores. After the field trip they reflect on their experiences,

and consolidate their linguistic and cultural learning in a variety of formats, some regular such as journals and scrapbooks, some particular to the unit such as skits or collages. Each week, the field trip demands more linguistically of the students.

**A Holiday Course**

| *Monday* | *Tuesday* | *Wednesday* | *Thursday* | *Friday* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Week One** | **Theme: Shopping** | | | |
| ■ Getting to know you<br>■ Program overview<br>■ Attitudes and opinions<br>■ Shops found downtown<br>■ Concentration game<br>■ Discussion<br>■ The interview<br>■ Downtown walkabout | ■ Writing in journals<br>■ Walkabout follow-up<br>■ Song: "Big Yellow Taxi" | ■ Field trip to the mall | ■ Field trip follow-up<br>■ Discussion<br>■ Writing<br>■ Language lab<br>■ Panel discussion groups<br>■ Homework | ■ Discussion groups<br>■ Feedback<br>■ Journals<br>■ Scrapbooks |
| **Week Two** | **Theme: Food** | | | |
| ■ "This tastes _____"<br>■ Adjectives for foods<br>■ Identify the foods<br>■ Categories worksheet<br>■ "Do you like _____"<br>■ ABC game<br>■ Self-interview | ■ Small group discussion<br>■ Interview an American<br>■ Discussion<br>■ Menus<br>■ Restaurant role play<br>■ Register<br>■ Vocabulary | ■ Listening<br>■ Small group work<br>■ Practice<br>■ Error correction<br>■ Shops role play<br>■ Follow-up<br>■ American weights and measures<br>■ Language lab | ■ Half-day field trip to a supermarket, a food cooperative, and a restaurant<br>■ Discussion<br>■ Synthesis activity | ■ Skits<br>■ Feedback<br>■ Journals<br>■ Scrapbooks |
| **Week Three** | **Theme: Animals** | | | |
| ■ Game<br>■ Brainstorming<br>■ Reading<br>■ Discussion<br>■ Interview preparation<br>■ Homework | ■ Drawings<br>■ You become an animal<br>■ Process writing<br>■ "Talk Show"<br>■ Video the talk show<br>■ Journals | ■ Field trip to the zoo | ■ Field trip follow-up<br>■ Language lab<br>■ Synthesis activity<br>■ Homework | ■ To the teacher's home<br>■ Murals/collages<br>■ Feedback<br>■ Journals<br>■ Scrapbooks |

**Practice :**

What are some possible units in your course, derived from the organizing principle? (For example, in Brooke Palmer's syllabus, the organizing principle was types of scientific writing and the units were classification, description of a mechanism etc. In Denise Maksail-Fine's course, the organizing principle was topics and some of the units were family life, house and home, community, and neighborhood.)

One of the main principles of sequencing in putting a course together is based on the common sense principle of building. In other words, step A prepares in some way (provides the foundation) for step B. Step B in turn prepares for Step C and so on. Some ways to understand the idea that A prepares for B are:

**A is simpler or less demanding; B is more complex or more demanding.**

For example, in Brooke Palmer's course, describing a mechanism is simpler than describing a process. In a grammar sequence, the present perfect tense is typically learned after the past tense because it is considered more complex linguistically (auxiliary + past participle) and conceptually (it is about the past as related to the present).

**A is more controlled; B is more open-ended.**

For example, in Toby Brody's newspaper course, learning to summarize an existing newspaper article is more controlled, while learning how to write an article is more open-ended.

**A provides knowledge or skills required to do or understand B (orB builds on knowledge and skills provided by A)**

The two examples above from Brooke's and Toby's course could also be used to illustrate this point. In Valarie Barnes' holiday course, learning the vocabulary for and then role-playing ordering in a restaurant provided knowledge and skills required for ordering in an actual restaurant.

Another basis for sequencing is the one Denise Maksail-Fine chose for her course: from the individual to the home to the community to the larger world. History and literature courses can follow a chronological sequence. Deciding over the span of the course how units should be sequenced is not an exact science, however, because different teachers will have different views of the relationship between A, B, and C. One teacher may reverse the process of a typical writing course in which students learn how to write paragraphs and then learn to write essays. Instead, students may be given the task of writing an essay first in order to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses. Subsequent lessons may break down

the component skills in order to address the weaknesses. Students may first approach texts holistically before working with parts of them. Some teachers choose not to sequence their courses in advance, but work from a "menu" of units or strands and choose from them as the course progresses.

**Practice**

The lists below are drawn from the table of contents of three different

English language textbooks. The first is a list of topics. The second is a list of grammar points. The third is a list of writing tasks. Do the following with each one separately:

1- Work with a partner and decide the order in which you would teach the items on the list in a way that makes sense to both of you.

2. Compare your order with another pair and discuss the reasons for any differences.

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| Topics: | Grammar points: |
|---|---|
| people: education and childhood | simple present tense |
| cities: locations and directions | present continuous tense |
| food | subject pronouns |
| requests and complaints | yes/no questions |
| housing | questions with *which, how much* |
| travel and vacation | present tense of *be* |
| machines and appliances | frequency adverbs |
| holidays and customs | questions with *what* |
| changes and contrasts: | There is/are |
| life in past, present, future | future with *be going to* |
| movies, books and entertainment | count and non count nouns |
| buildings and landmarks | prepositions of location |
| money | past tense of *be* |
| people's abilities; jobs | |
| information about someone's past | |

**Writing tasks:**

*defining:* writing about sleep problems
*comparing and contrasting:* writing about a car purchase
*writing a memo:* personal writing habits
*persuasive writing:* writing about subcultures within societies
*classifying:* writing about migrating to your community
*collecting and reporting data:* consumer habits
*description and narrative:* writing about personal success

## Further references

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