

CHAPTER 2: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO COURSE DESIGN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the levels and elements of course design are discussed. The three levels of educational programme planning as proposed by Rodgers (1989:24) are discussed in terms of their definitions and other factors that may shed light on the whole process of course design. This is important as it contextualizes the preschool ESL syllabus within the whole history and development of this area of Applied Linguistics.

This chapter also emphasizes the importance of a sound theory as the basis of course design, as Dye (1984:96) found in a sample-based study of preschool curriculum content:

Curriculum content and organization are likely to be amongst the most important items of provision relevant to the needs preschool children

According to Rodgers (1989:24), there are three levels of educational programme planning. These three levels together with an additional level, as proposed by Van der Walt (1985:78), are illustrated in Figure 2.1 in order to indicate their relation to one another.

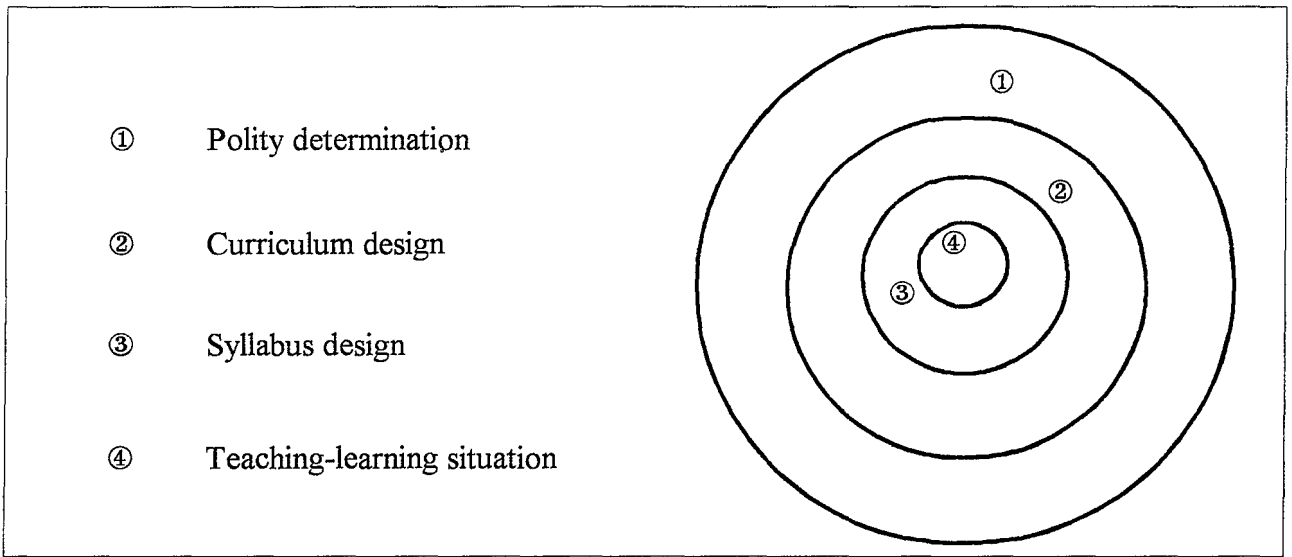


Fig 2.1: Summary of the four levels of educational programming

2.2 POLITY DETERMINATION

Rodgers (1989:29) defines the term “polity” (indicated as the outer level in Fig. 2.1) as the political organization or specific form of political organization or the prudent management of public affairs. The term “polity determination” is defined in a twofold manner, namely the analysis of the existing socio-political context, and the development of strategies to optimize the probable success and effectiveness of the programme within the context.

In his polity planning framework Rodgers (1989:31) includes four main factors, namely:

- knowledge factors (e.g. the subject area, the knowledge base and the outcomes)
- learner factors (e.g. teachability, motivation, and attainment expectations)
- instructional factors (e.g. curriculum design, teacher retraining possibilities, target schools and competing programmes), and
- management factors (e.g. development time, development team and development resources).

This first level encapsulates the other two levels and is therefore a very important level that is often overlooked in the planning process. Rodgers (1989:24) proposes that

examination of and planning within the relevant political context is critical to the success of any educational program and that program failures are often attributable to shortcomings in the sort of planning I call polity determination.

Thus, this level of planning needs to be carefully considered and included in the whole planning process.

2.3 CURRICULUM DESIGN

Johnson (1989:xi,1) says that the term curriculum “is used in the British sense to include all the factors which contribute to the teaching and learning situation” and he also defines it as “all the relevant decision making processes of all the participants”. (Curriculum is indicated as level 2 in Fig. 2.1.)

Yalden (1987:29) quotes Robertson in her definition of a curriculum:

The curriculum includes the goals, objectives, content, processes, resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and out of the school and community through classroom instruction and related programs.

According to Rodgers (1989:26), the concept of a curriculum is quite comprehensive :

Curriculum is all those activities in which children engage under the auspices of the school. This includes not only what pupils learn, but how they learn it, and how teachers help them learn, using what supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment, and in what kind of facilities.

In the report of the National Education Policy Investigation Curriculum Research Group (NEPI) the term “curriculum” is defined as follows:

The curriculum is central to the education process. Broadly defined, it refers to the teaching and learning activities and experiences which are provided by schools (NEPI, 1992:1).

The report (NEPI, 1992:1) further says that the curriculum includes the following aspects:

- the aims and objectives of the education system and the specific goals of the schools;
- the selection of content, how it is arranged into subjects, programmes and syllabuses, and the skills and processes included in this;
- ways of teaching and learning, and relationships between teachers and learners;
- the forms of assessment and evaluation which are used.

Van der Walt (1985:78) sums it up very aptly:

A curriculum, then, can be defined as a composite body of knowledge to be mastered by a learner in order to achieve certain predetermined aims. A school curriculum is the composite body of knowledge that has to be mastered by the pupil in order to achieve certain educational aims.

The curriculum is thus concerned with all the courses in a school, the aims and objectives of the education system, the selection and arrangement of content into the different subjects, the

relationship between the teachers and learners and the forms of assessment and evaluation used (NEPI, 1992:1). It is included in the polity determination and it includes the field of syllabus design and as well as the teaching-learning situation.

2.4 SYLLABUS DESIGN

Although the concepts of curriculum and syllabus are closely related, Rodgers (1989:26) draws a definite distinction between the two:

Syllabi, which prescribe the content to be covered by a given course, form only a small part of the total school programme. Curriculum is a far broader concept.

Given the distinctions made between “curriculum” and “syllabus” (see 2.2), the term “syllabus” (indicated as level 3 in Fig. 2.1) can thus be defined as the specific learning content chosen according to the guidelines given in the curriculum. It is more specific than the curriculum and, as very few syllabi include teaching methods, the teacher uses the syllabus as a guide to determine the teaching methods in preparation of specific lessons in the teaching-learning situation.

Initially, syllabus design was defined in terms of the “conventional model” (Rodgers, 1989:27). The conventional model was based on the hypothetico-deductive paradigm. It was prescriptive and rule-driven and defined a linear sequence of events consisting of the following steps:

- formulation of objectives
- selection of content
- task analysis
- designing learning activities
- defining behavioural outcomes
- evaluative measures.

This model was formal and quantitative and the teachers and children didn't take part in any of the above-mentioned steps.

However, the theory behind syllabus design has changed over the years. One reason for this is the

paradigm shift that civilization as we know it, is currently undergoing. According to Slattery (1995:17-18), civilization is undergoing a paradigm shift from the modern era to the postmodern era.

The modern era can be described as an era of capitalist industrial-based economy, relying on scientific technology, social progress and rational thought, while the postmodern era is characterized by fast-changing and cyclical concepts of time, sundry cultures, many genres of expressions, and educators who are committed to a new concept of syllabus design that will complement the social and cultural milieu of the new era (Slattery, 1995:18).

The theoretical model for syllabus design changed from a linear one to a circular one. Krüger (1980:33) supports this view, as all the different steps in syllabus development are interdependent, and if one aspect changes, it will automatically have an effect on the other aspects. This can better be illustrated by the model for a syllabus process as proposed by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21) as seen in Figure 2.2.

Krüger (1980:33) explains the interdependence of the different steps by means of an example. If an aspect changes in the situation analysis, it will have an influence on the setting of the aims, and this in turn will influence the selection of content, the selection of methods, as well as the evaluation.

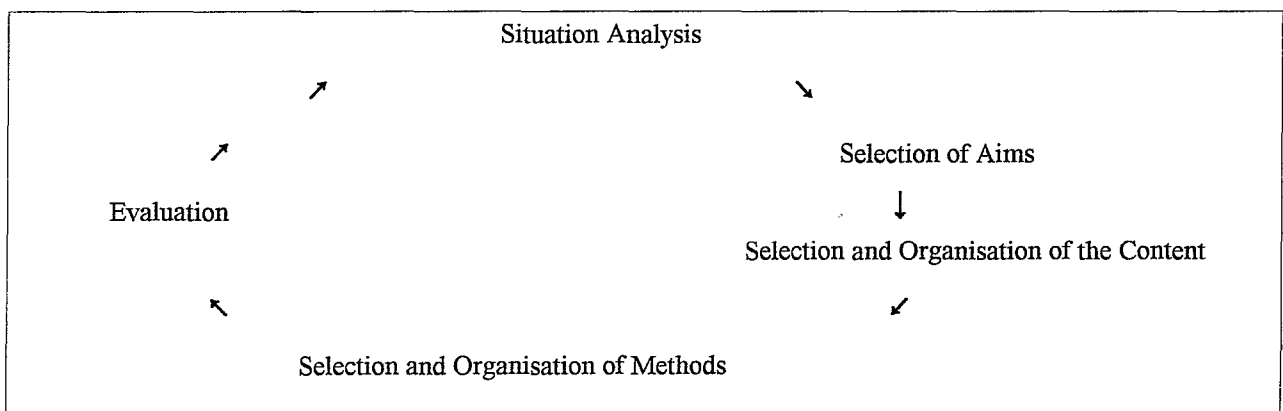


Figure 2.2 The circular model for syllabus design as proposed by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21)

The circular model also has value with regard to the fact that syllabus design usually takes time, and that (as in the postmodern view) the past and the future can inform and enrich the present.

Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:22-23) are also of the opinion that syllabus design

is not an activity which is undertaken once in a school and then is finished. Rather, it is a continuous process,...with knowledge and insights derived from assessment being fed back and providing a fresh starting-point for further development.

This means that syllabus design becomes an organic and context-dependent process. It also becomes more situational, more qualitative and more interactive. Contrary to the linear model, this model not only involves policy makers and programme administrators, but also the teachers, trainers, tax payers and the students themselves.

What is also useful in this model is that the steps in the model can be used on all three of the inner levels as illustrated in Fig. 2.1. When designing a curriculum the emphasis will be on the situation analysis and the selection of aims for a whole school system. However, the selection and organization of content and methods as well as methods of evaluation will also be implied.

In syllabus design the situation analysis, selection of aims and the selection and organization of content for a specific subject or learning area will be emphasized, and this will be used as a guideline for the selection of teaching methods and methods of evaluation.

In the teaching-learning situation the emphasis will be on the selection and organization of the content and methods as well as on evaluation, but these steps will definitely be influenced by the aims as set out in the syllabus and curriculum as well as the situational aspects.

In the course of this dissertation, each step as proposed in the model of Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21) (cf. Fig. 2.2) will be scrutinized and discussed within the South African context and will be applied to the syllabus that will be designed for the African preprimary children in Ikageng. The emphasis will be on the situation analysis, the selection of aims or outcomes and the selection and organization of content with some reference to the selection and organization of methods.

2.5 THE TEACHING-LEARNING SITUATION

The teaching-learning situation refers to what takes place in the classroom between the teacher and the learners. As the teacher is professionally trained, he has the liberty to interpret the syllabus and adapt it to the classroom situation in order to implement it effectively (Van der Walt, 1985:78).

The teacher should thus have the freedom to select and organize the teaching methods and methods of evaluation suited to his specific classes. Although the emphasis is on the selection and organization of teaching and evaluation methods, it is clear that the teacher uses his professional discretion in analyzing the situation, selecting the aims according to the curriculum and syllabus and in selecting and organizing the content.

Here we also come to the explanation of the title of this dissertation. It is called an ESL Programme and not an ESL Syllabus as it not merely prescribes the content to be covered by the course, but it also provides the activities and tasks (or suggestions for teaching methods) for the teaching-learning situation.

2.6 CURRICULUM 2005 WITHIN THE THEORY OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Slattery (1995:xvii) is of the opinion that the field of curriculum and instruction

must now be reevaluated for three reasons: first, schooling in the 1990s is in the midst of a debilitating crisis; second, a postmodern worldview is emerging; and third, a reconceptualization in the field of curriculum and instruction has occurred.

According to Slattery (1995:20), contemporary schooling is too often characterized by “violence, bureaucratic gridlock, curricular stagnation, depersonalized evaluation, political conflict, economic crisis, decaying infrastructure, emotional fatigue, demoralization of personnel and hopelessness”. This author is convinced that postmodernism offers the best theoretical paradigm

for exploring curriculum development.

Slattery (1995:20-27) doesn't give a structured definition of a postmodern curriculum, but discusses certain characteristics it should contain. He also makes use of characteristics as described by Kincheloe. The following is a summary of those characteristics:

- time is viewed as a cyclical process where the past and future inform and enrich the present rather than a linear arrow where events can be isolated, analyzed and objectified;
- relationships are seen between ostensibly different things (called metaphoric cognition);
- logic and emotion are connected by stretching the boundaries of the imagination;
- facts are seen as part of a larger process of connecting the holographic mind to holographic reality;
- different frames of reference are perceived in order to develop the cognitive power of empathy;
- the particular place and context of the educative event are attended to;
- the interaction of the particular and the general is understood;
- simplistic notions of cause-effect are transcended to create nonlinear holism;
- the world is seen as a text to be interpreted rather than one to be explained; and
- various levels of connection between the mind and the ecosystem are uncovered to reveal larger patterns of life-forces in order to find a meaningful connection between causally unconnected events.

According to the Department of Education (1997:7), the following are some of the key principles that guided the development of Curriculum 2005 for Early Childhood Development (ECD)¹:

- Integration
- Holistic development
- Relevance

¹South Africa is the first country to develop a curriculum policy within a broad ECD vision encompassing 0-9 years, called the Foundation Phase. There are also the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6) as well as the Senior Phase (Grade 5-7), but as this dissertation focuses on preschoolers, the Foundation Phase of Curriculum 2005 will be emphasized.

- Participation and ownership
- Accountability and transparency
- Child-orientated approach
- Flexibility
- Critical and creative thinking
- Progression
- Anti-biased approach
- Inclusion of children with disabilities, out-of-school children and other children with special educational needs.

These characteristics are very similar to those described by Slattery (1995:20-27). South Africa has thus also made the paradigm shift from the modern period to a postmodern one with regard to the school curriculum.

This can also be seen in the Learning Programme Statement of Literacy² as described by the Department of Education (1997:8):

Initially "literacy" was seen as a cognitive process that enables reading, writing and numeracy. In this document the use of the term "literacy" has expanded to include several kinds of literacies across all Learning Areas³. "Literacies" stresses the issue of access to the world and to knowledge through development of multiple capacities within all of us to make sense of our worlds through whatever means we have, not only texts and books.

The overarching goal of language literacy is the development of affective communication. The focus will thus be on the learner's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Department of

²Literacy is one of the three learning programmes which are the vehicle through which the new curriculum is implemented. The other two are Numeracy and Life Skills.

³SAQA adopted the following eight Learning Areas: Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC), Human and Social Sciences (HSS), Technology (T), Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences (MLMMS), Natural Sciences (NS), Arts and Culture (AC), Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), Life Orientation (LO).

Education, 1997:9). Visual literacy includes the interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal language while media literacy entails the reading of e.g., television and film as cultural messages (Department of Education, 1997:9).

In a postmodern curriculum such as Curriculum 2005:

Language is not an end in itself, but a means to act in the world, in order to establish relationships, to interact with others, to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge and to obtain and convey ideas and information.
(Department of Education, 1997:9)

2.7 ESL SYLLABUS TYPES

The compilation of a syllabus depends largely on the principles behind the curriculum. As the theory of curriculum has developed through the years, different types of ESL syllabi have come into being.

There are firstly those designs based on an organised body of knowledge (Berwick, 1989:49). This was the predominant design until recently. It focuses on the intellectual development of the learner and it also emphasizes the transference of a systematic body of knowledge to the learner.

The second form includes those designs based on specific competencies (Berwick, 1989:49). It emphasizes the performance objectives and the learning of skills for particular purposes. The specifications of objectives is a major component. English for Specific Purposes Programmes is an example of this.

Then there are also those designs based on social activities and problems (Berwick, 1989:50). These are most influential in Second Language Teaching and Foreign Language Teaching. The target language is viewed as a tool for coping with the social and economical demands of daily life.

Berwick (1989:50) also identifies designs based on cognitive or learning processes. This has always been a peripheral rather than a mainstream approach. It emphasizes the way learners think and aims

at strengthening the learners' ability to examine and solve problems by themselves.

The fifth form of design includes those designs based on feelings and attitudes (Berwick, 1989:50). This represents the humanist affective end of the spectrum. Language is viewed more as tool than an object and the development of the whole person through language is emphasized.

Finally, there are those designs based on the needs and interests of the learner. These designs generally supported rather than supplanted the other approaches. The central characteristics of this approach are the systematic assessment of the learners' language needs and the consultation of the learners at appropriate points in the planning and instruction.

The last three types of design are underlain by a postmodern curriculum and can be linked to the circular model for syllabus design as illustrated in Fig. 2.2. These three types of ESL syllabi in combination would be most helpful in the design of an ESL syllabus for preschoolers.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the four levels of educational programming planning as proposed by Rodgers (1989:24) and Van der Walt (1985:78), namely polity determination, curriculum design, syllabus design as well as the teaching-learning situation have been reviewed and the importance of all four of these levels in the planning of an ESL programme for preschoolers has been indicated.

Polity determination includes knowledge factors, learner factors, instructional factors and management factors. It encapsulates curriculum design, syllabus design as well as the teaching-learning situation as it forms the political, ideological, social and educational framework for the curriculum and the syllabus.

The curriculum is concerned with all the courses in a school, the aims and objectives of the education system, the selection and arrangement of content into the different subjects, the relationship between the teachers and learners and the forms of assessment and evaluation used (NEPI, 1992:1). It is

included in the polity determination and it includes both syllabus design and the teaching-learning situation.

The syllabus prescribes the content to be covered by a specific course or subject (Rodgers, 1989:26). It forms part of both the polity determination and curriculum design and therefore when planning for a syllabus these two broader frameworks should be taken into consideration. It also influences what the teaching-learning situation.

The teaching-learning situation refers to what takes place in the classroom between the teacher and the learners. It also includes the teaching methods chosen to familiarize learners with the teaching content and to guide them in achieving the aims that were set out in the syllabus and the curriculum.

Different theories and models have been proposed for syllabus design. These models and theories have changed in the course the past few decades as civilization made a paradigm shift from the modern to the postmodern. Instead of using a linear, prescriptive rule-driven model (called the "conventional model" (Rodgers, 1989:27)), the circular model as proposed by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21) is now more appropriate for the times we live in.

This circular model implies that syllabus design is a "never-ending process" (Nicholls & Nicholls, 1978:14), and includes a situation analysis as part of the process which would then also take into consideration the needs of the learners, the polity determination and the curriculum within which the syllabus should be designed.