

## LANGUAGE CURRICULUM PLANNING FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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### **Abstract**

As we begin the new millennium, many changes in society may affect trends in educational structures and language teaching respectively. A new millennium marks a moment when it is appropriate to think about what we have done, where we are now and how we should plan for the future (Littlejohn 1998). If we look back at our recent past, we can identify trends which are likely to characterize the nature of future society. This paper is an attempt to provide a picture of language curriculum planning during the third millennium by identifying four major trends supposed to affect the field in the new millennium including social constructivism, postmodernism, intercultural communicative competence, and technological advancement.

**Key words:** constructivism, future curriculum, postmodernism, third millennium, intercultural communicative competence

### **1. Introduction**

We are in a period of rapid change: socially, politically, technologically, environmentally and culturally. The significance of these changes has led many educationalists to call for what Littlejohn (1998) named a 'future curriculum', that is a curriculum which actively discusses the future and prepares students for their lives ahead. In this paper, the issue of language curriculum planning for the new millennium will be discussed from different perspectives by identifying four major trends which will probably affect the field in the new millennium.

Hadely (1998) examined the future trends in EFL syllabus design in the new millennium. He believed that EFL academic community periodically sways from one extreme to another. Before the 1970's, structural syllabi based upon grammatical forms were prevalent. Gradually, a move took place away from structural syllabi towards a focus on the communicative aspects of the language and on learner autonomy which reached its climax in the early 1990's. Now it appears to him that the pendulum is swinging back towards a focus on form and structure. Hadely (1998: 65) stated that during the next century, it is expected that the dominant ELT syllabus designs will have returned full circle. According to him: "We will likely see a continued shift

away from analytic, skill-based syllabi in favor of synthetic content-based syllabi. The popularity of syllabi such as CLT and Task-Based Learning is anticipated to decline while interest in lexical, structurally based syllabi will flourish. Language classes will also see a greater emphasis on the topical, and ideological concerns of curriculum planners”.

He believed that for some teachers it may be difficult to rethink their assumptions about language learning, and they may make eclectic decisions based upon the real life needs of their students.

According to Hadely (2001) instead of searching for the latest teaching technique or the most recent discovery, a key strategy for language teachers, in the next century, is to be aware of the cyclic trends taking place, make preparations by getting training and better qualifications, and by reflecting upon their own beliefs as language educators.

Rogers (2000) proposes ten scenarios which may, individually and collectively, shape the teaching of second languages in the next decades of the new millennium:

- a. *Teacher/Learner Collaboration*: using matchmaking techniques to link learners and teachers who have similar styles and approaches to language learning;
- b. *Method Synergistics*: crossbreeding elements of various methods to find those practices which best support effective learning;
- c. *Curriculum Developmentalism*: viewing methodology as an integrated component in a larger view of instructional design;
- d. *Content-Basics*: assuming that language learning is a by-product of a focus on meaning, on acquiring some specific topical content;
- e. *Multi-intelligence*: basing instruction on a “multiple-intelligences” view, in which different approaches play to different learner talents;
- f. *Total Functional Response*: recombining the Notional/Functional idea with some new systemic twists;
- g. *Strategopedia*: teaching learners the strategies they need so that they can learn on their own;
- h. *Lexical Phraseology*: re-crafting both the nature and substance of language learning (LL) to focus on lexical phrases and collocations;
- i. *O-zone Whole Language*: engaging all aspects of language study; literature, language history, linguistic analysis, and so forth, in support of second language learning;
- j. *Full-frontal Communicativity*: Engaging all aspects of human communicative capacities; expression, gesture, tone, and so forth, in support of second language learning.

## **2. Social constructivism movement**

According to Felix (2005) common adjectives attributed to both education and educational institutions in the third millennium are: “flexible, inclusive, collaborative, authentic, relevant, global and effective”.

The shift from second to third millennium thinking, as shown by him in the following Table 1, identifies a noticeable move from instructivist to constructivist pedagogy. Exponents of third millennium thinking believe in pedagogies that foster the acquisition of meta-skills and knowledge; relevant/negotiated curricula, collaboration; lifelong learning; global learning and access to real-life tutors and informants. The function of an educational system is to create the conditions whereby learners might recreate their own knowledge and skills.

Therefore, as Felix (2005) argued, it is not surprising that social constructivism has gained significance as the obvious pedagogical paradigm. McKernan (2008: ivx) similarly argued that one of the great challenges of our time is to teach for understanding as distinct from memorization and to view education as the construction of personal meaning rather than the reproduction of meaning.

## **3. Postmodernism and language curriculum**

Curriculum development has to move in tandem with the ever changing social needs and global trends in order to stay relevant and competitive at all times (Seow 2006). Littlejohn (1998) similarly argued that language teaching is “a part of society as much as anything else” and believed that the signs of a ‘postmodern’ society have largely reflected in contemporary practices in language teaching. Weideman (2003) referred to Post-modernism as the latest model in applied linguistics which characterized by political relations in teaching and multiplicity of perspectives.

Tella (2004: 95) argued that the future of FLE is certainly an example of post-modern education. It is post-modern in the sense that ‘it does not enumerate facts, nor does it define some facts as correct and others as wrong or set strict aims for learning situations’. He also asserted that contemporary practices in language teaching are post-modern, in the positive sense of the word, in that they provide language learners with different narratives or *genres* to support their growth, while giving them access to a rich collection of contexts.

According to Marsh (2005: 228) postmodern educators can no longer teach a subject in terms of facts, or a series of events to be memorized. What is needed is:

- a. the teacher to continually reflect on the subject of teaching;
- b. for students to become engaged in telling their life stories about the subject;

- c. to encourage students to keep a journal to record their personal perspectives during a particular course;
- d. to arrange classroom chairs in a circle to enable informal sharing by students of their personal perspectives;
- e. to reflect upon ideas that appear to have been hidden or forgotten;
- f. to question linear descriptions and artificially contrived categories;
- g. to reflect upon events of the present and how they provide access to the future.

**Table1. Second millennium thinking vs. third millennium thinking (adopted from Felix 2005: 87)**

Second Millennium Thinking	Third Millennium Thinking
Important learning can only occur in formal learning facilities.	People can learn things from many sources.
Everyone must learn a common 'core' of content	Everyone must understand the learning process and have basic learning skills.
The learning process is controlled by the teacher. What is to be taught, when it should be taught and how it should be taught should all be determined by a professional person.	The learning process is controlled by the learner. What is to be taught, when it should be taught and how it should be taught will all be determined by the learner.
Education and learning are individual activities.	Success is based on how well learners learn as individuals.
Education and learning are highly interactive activities.	Success is based on how well learners work together as a team.
Formal education prepares people for life.	Formal education is the basis for lifelong learning.
The terms 'education' and 'school' mean almost the same thing.	'School' is only one of a multitude of steps in the education journey.
Once you leave formal education, you enter the 'real world'.	Formal education provides a range of interactions between learners and the world of business, commerce and politics.
The more formal qualifications you have the more successful you will be.	The more capability and adaptability you have the more successful you will be.

Marsh (2005: 228) also argued that postmodern educators need to engage in collaborative interpretation with their colleagues. The curriculum experience must be open to reflection, because from a postmodern viewpoint everything requires recursive interpretation. Thus, the official syllabuses and curriculum documents cannot be used in any passive way – as a teacher-proof curriculum. It requires teachers to share ideas collaboratively with other teachers, and to create a community of interpreters.

Littlejohn (1998) argued that we need to look beyond the concerns of the language syllabus, and not simply drift with the flow. We need, for example, to think about the content and significance of our materials, and the

values and attitudes we project. Littlejohn (1998) set out six principles that he thought could underpin future language curriculum development.

### **3.1. Coherence**

The use of themes, topics, and projects is going to be encouraged in order to connect lessons together and provide coherence and a deeper focus and understanding.

### **3.2. Significant content**

The selection of content based on what is worth learning and thinking about, which is used in a way, which does not, on the one hand trivialize significant issues or, on the other hand, make trivial things seem important. A key topic could be to raise students' awareness of future developments and discuss their own hopes, aspirations, worries, and personal actions.

### **3.3. Decision-making in the classroom**

A structured plan will be made for active involvement of students in making decisions in the classroom, and taking on more responsibility for what happens in their lessons.

### **3.4. Use of students' intelligence**

Types of exercises which require *thinking*, beyond memory retrieval or repetition, and involving students in hypothesizing, negotiating, planning, and evaluating will probably be used.

### **3.5. Cultural understanding**

Specific kinds of tasks and texts will be used which require students to look through the eyes of others, to learn the relative nature of values, and to understand why people in different contexts do different things.

### **3.6. Critical language awareness**

The main concern will be to view all language use critically - that is, to look beyond the surface meaning and ask oneself questions such as "*Why* are they saying that?" "What is *not* being said?" and "Who benefits from what is being said?" We might for example ask students to think deeply about the reasons for which passive voice is used in a newspaper headline.

Clark & Ivancic (1999: 67) similarly emphasized the importance of raising critical language awareness as one of the significant curriculum aims for the new millennium. They identified the objectives of bringing CLA into the curriculum as helping learners to develop more consciousness and control over the way they use language and over the way they are positioned by other people's use of language. They believed that the following elements

should be included in the third millennium curriculum development in academic literacy:

- a. raising consciousness about issues of power and status in relation to writing in an academic context;
- b. raising consciousness about how writing is embedded in a sociocultural and institutional context;
- c. demystifying reading and writing processes and practices;
- d. recognizing that difficulty with writing is not an individual deficit but an inherent feature of the writing process;
- e. emphasizing that writing is a thinking process which entails not only to use language accurately but also to engage with meaning to achieve a particular aim;
- f. critically examining the relationship between context, purpose and form;
- g. raising awareness about ways in which writing constructs the writer's identity;
- h. paying attention to the writer–reader relationship;
- i. understanding the cultural factors and beliefs about originality and ownership which surround intertextual practices, including attribution, referencing and 'plagiarism';
- j. critically examining argumentation purposes and practices;
- k. questioning traditional notions of correctness and appropriateness

#### **4. Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT**

Nunan (2006) made a number of predictions about the future of curricula in the new millennium. One of them is the growing dominance of a limited number of world languages.

Significant events of the late 20th and early 21st century have led to the rapid growth of American influence around the world. According to Hadely (2006) the informal empire of Anglo–American cultural norms both explicitly rewards and implicitly threatens nations in the expanding circle, depending upon their mastery of the English language.

However, Alptekin (2002) questioned the validity of pedagogic models based on the native speaker notion of communicative competence. According to him a new pedagogic model is needed to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication. This model should take into account the following criteria:

- a. Successful bilinguals with intercultural insights and knowledge should serve as pedagogic models in English as an International Language (EIL) rather than the monolingual native speaker.
- b. Intercultural communicative competence should be developed among EIL learners by equipping them with linguistic and cultural devices

which will enable them to communicate effectively with others, and also by equipping them with an awareness of difference, and with strategies for coping with such difference.

- c. The EIL pedagogy should be one of global appropriacy and local appropriation, in that it should prepare learners 'to be both global and local speakers of English and to feel at home in both international and national cultures' (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996, as cited in Alptekin 2002).
- d. Instructional materials and activities should involve local and international contexts that are familiar and relevant to language learners' lives.
- e. Instructional materials and activities should have suitable discourse samples pertaining to native and nonnative speaker interactions, as well as two nonnative speaker interactions.

As an expert with lots of experience in curriculum and materials development studies in China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam, Tomlinson (2005) stated that for most learners of English in Asia, Standard British English and General American English are neither necessary nor attainable models. He argued that most learners of English in Asia are unlikely to need to communicate with native speakers of English but they are likely to need to communicate in English with other non-native speakers.

### **5. The impact of technology in the new millennium**

Nowadays, we are living in an era of information and technology, the influence of which on education is unavoidable. The traditional language classroom is slowly changing with the advances and increasing uses of technology.

Language teaching and learning via Internet has increased remarkably in many parts of the world. Bax (2003) offers a critical examination and reassessment of the history of CALL and argues for three categories; Restricted, Open and Integrated CALL (Bax 2003). He believed that we are currently using the second approach, Open CALL, but that our aim should be to attain a state of 'normalization' (p. 23).

According to him 'Normalization' is relevant to any kind of technological innovation and refers to the stage when the technology becomes invisible, embedded in everyday practice and hence 'normalized'.

Bax (2003) stated that CALL will be normalized when computers are treated as secondary to learning itself. In other words, it will be normalized when the needs of learners be carefully analyzed at first, and then the computer be used to serve those needs. In fact it may take several years for these practices to become commonplace.

Ioannou-Georgiou (2006: 383) listed the following factors which can help towards normalization of CALL:

- a. *Appropriate hardware*: lack of basic equipment such as computers and printers can constrain development.
- b. *Appropriate software*: most existing software is directed towards self-access and not for classroom use, thus placing obstacles for progress towards normalization.
- c. *Easy access to technology*: a key to normalization is for teachers to have access to the technology whenever they need it and, preferably, at all times.
- d. *'Top-down' policy to use computers*: the decision to use computers in teaching should come from the management and should be strictly adhered to. Even though it is not a democratic procedure, it seems to be beneficial.
- e. *An integration of the technology into the syllabus*: it is important for technology to be integrated into the syllabus and not to be an extra add-on which is used whenever 'there is time'. A process which schedules technology into regular syllabus activities helps teachers and students view and use technology as an integral part of the lesson.
- f. *Teacher training as regards technological literacy*: teachers should be trained so that they are confident users of technology.
- g. *Teacher training as regards CALL implementation/pedagogy*: teachers should be trained how to implement CALL in the classroom without underestimating language learning pedagogy.
- h. *Provision of plentiful support to teachers*: technical and pedagogical support is essential in order to save teachers' time spent on maintaining the equipment and help build teachers' confidence in their efforts to use new technological applications.
- i. *Familiarization of technical support with EFL methodology*: a positive factor would be for technical staff to be initiated into FL methodology so as to improve co-operation between teaching and technical staff.
- j. *Personalization of technology*: learners and teachers should have free access to technology and should have a sense of ownership towards the technology, feel comfortable, and at ease with the tool.
- k. *Involvement of teaching staff in decisions about technology*: teachers should be involved in the process of CALL implementation to promote the feeling of ownership, they may have about technology.

Ioannou-Georgiou (2006) concluded that the role of the CALL professional, and the extent to which s/he can have an effect on progress, is shaped by the wider economic, social and technological aspects of societies.



However, he recorded many inspiring examples of motivated colleagues who are determined to achieve progress in their own individual areas, and to act as agents of change within their institutions or their countries.

## 6. Conclusion

According to Bahruth, & Steiner (2000: 122) "As teachers, we can flow with the mainstream and subsequently reproduce hegemony, or we can question the status quo and problematize the system that has continually failed in its stated intentions of promoting a democratic society, and thereby take steps toward transforming society through teachers as cultural workers".

According to him taking the path of critical pedagogy requires a philosophical shift. The teacher is no longer the only knowledge base for teaching. Teachers are no longer the dominant voice in the classroom. Students are asked to become active learners, critical thinkers, non-passive, and their voices are respected as constructive contributors.

McKernan (2008) believed that in the new millennium we need to ask ourselves 'what kind of curriculum we need in the new millennium that is relevant to the lives and intelligent action of our students?', and 'Whose interests do the knowledge, skills and dispositions selected for curriculum serve?'

As Eaton (2010) argued, today's language classroom is vastly different from that of mid-to late twentieth century. Then trends in language learning are moving us forward in such a way as to empower our students to communicate with others across the globe. However, as Littlejohn (1998) argued we need to be aware of what is happening so that we can make the future as we would like it to be, and not simply drift forward.

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