Options in a task-based language-teaching curriculum

An educational perspective

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I draw on the education literature to describe four educational curriculum models, which serve as a basis for presenting four TBLT curricula based on the proposals of Prabhu (1987); Willis (1996), Long (1985, 2015a, 2015b) and myself (Ellis, 2003 and 2019) – all of which have figured in the development of TBLT. I propose a set of questions that can be used to evaluate these models. I then turn to examine the curriculum design process, identifying options in TBLT curricula that are available at each stage of the process. I point to a tension that exists between what SLA theory indicates is needed and what environmental constraints make feasible and conclude with a plea for flexibility by weighing up which options are appropriate in different teaching situations. I also summarize how I see TBLT benefitting from adopting a broad education perspective that includes critical language pedagogy.

Keywords: general educational curriculum models, four TBLT curricula, evaluating TBLT curricula, options in the design and implementation of TBLT, need for flexibility

Introduction

In several previous publications (Ellis, 2003, 2019), I have argued that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is not monolithic and that different versions exist. My purpose in this article is to examine these different versions. In doing this I will take what Byrnes (2015) called a 'curricular approach' by considering all the elements in the design of a curriculum: environmental factors; goals; the definition, selection and sequencing of content; the development of instructional materials; teaching techniques and strategies; assessment, and program evaluation.

I am motivated to adopt this broad perspective by a concern I have that some advocates of TBLT see it as involving a fixed set or procedures. As an example of this tendency, consider what Baralt and Gomez (2017) say about "TBLT fundamentals" at the beginning of their article:

> As described by Long (2015a), a fully task-based course must first begin with a needs analysis in order to identify learners' authentic needs with the language. From this needs analysis, target tasks are identified and classified into target task types. Pedagogical tasks are then designed. (p. 29)

In their article, Baralt and Gomez provide a very useful account of how to do online task-based language teaching, but it seems to me unhelpful to insist what "must" be done to design a task-based course. Interestingly, the examples of the pedagogical tasks that they include in their article do not appear to be based on "target tasks" and "target-task types". There are other ways of organizing a task-based syllabus, for example, one based on the 'themes' judged of interest to learners or of social significance (see, for example, Kim, Jung, & Tracy-Ventura's (2017) account of a task-based curriculum designed for Korean university EFL students). How we arrive at the content of a task-based syllabus must inevitably take account of the teaching context and the overall goals of the curriculum, which will not always point to starting with a needs analysis – a point I will elaborate on later.

There is a similar tendency to prescribe (and proscribe) TBLT at the level of methodology. Willis and Willis (2013) propose that attention to linguistic form should be restricted until after the learners have finished performing a task. Long (1991, 2015a, 2015b) emphasizes the need for 'focus on form' (i.e., strategies used to draw or direct attention to form) while learners are struggling to perform a task, arguing that this is needed to overcome learners' limited ability to learn purely implicitly and that its contingent nature makes it more likely to facilitate learning than decontextualized form-focussed instruction. Here then, we find very different ideas about how to handle attention to form in TBLT. They represent two very different methodological options, supported by different rationales, but arguably both worthy of consideration.

In the next two sections, I draw on the education literature to describe three general curriculum models. This serves as a basis for presenting four TBLT curricula: Prabhu (1987); Willis (1996), Long (1985, 2015a, 2015b) and my own (Ellis, 2003 and 2019). All four models have figured in the development of TBLT. I then turn to examine the curriculum design process, identifying options in TBLT curricula that are available at each stage of the process. I conclude the article with a plea for flexibility and the need to weigh up which options are appropriate in different teaching situations. I also summarize how I see TBLT benefitting from drawing on a broad education perspective.

Curriculum models in education

Writing in 1984, Stern suggested that educational theory was the least disciplinary area attended to by applied linguists concerned with language teaching. By and large, this lacuna continues today. Language teaching theorists present their proposals at applied linguistic conferences, not at educational conferences, implying that language teaching is in some way unique, unrelated to issues of general education. This tendency to specialization is very evident in TBLT. The International Association of Task-based Language Teaching (IATBLT) mounts its own biannual conference, which serves as the forum that many researchers and educators interested in TBLT choose to attend.[1] Language teaching, however, is inherently educational and so the failure to draw on curriculum theory in education is surprising. There is much to be gained by adopting what Byrnes (2015) called a 'curricular perspective'. As White (1988) pointed out, "different models of curriculum represent the expression of different value systems, and consequently, of quite divergent views on education" (p. 24). Understanding how curricula differ in terms of their views of education can help to identify the values that underscore different proposals for TBLT.

One of the standard works on curriculum studies in education is Kelly (2009).[2] Kelly rejects the "limited view of the curriculum, defined in terms of what teaching and instruction is to be offered and sometimes also what its purposes, its objectives, are" (p. 7) because this view takes no account of broader educational and moral dimensions. He is also skeptical of an approach to curriculum development based on the traditional disciplines of education:

> Quite serious and extensive problems have arisen when the solutions to educational questions have been sought, and accepted, from psychologists or philosophers or sociologists, since inevitably such experts have a limited, uni-dimensional, and thus distorted of the educational issues and practices to which they are applying the techniques and methodologies of their own disciplines.
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> (p. 24)

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1. The separation of applied linguistic work in language teaching and general education is most clearly evident in the former's overriding concern with 'syllabus' (see for example, Nunan (1988), the collection of papers in English Language Teaching Documents: General English language syllabus design (1984), and Faravani and Zeraaatpishe, (2016), and the latter's broader interest in 'curriculum'. Syllabus is but one part – albeit an important one – of a curriculum. There is, however, a growing recognition of the need for an educational perspective, as is evident in Samuda and Bygate (2009) and Long (2015a).

2. Kelly is, of course, not the only authority on curriculum design. A reviewer also pointed to the work of Hlebowitsh (2004) on project-based learning.

His comments serve as a warning to those proponents of TBLT curricula that draw primarily on research and theory in SLA. I include myself among them. For Kelly, an educational curriculum has these characteristics:

- It should address fundamental values such as freedom of thought and social and political empowerment.
- It cannot be solely vocational in orientation.
- It must be a "total curriculum" (i.e., not restricted to a specific subject area) and take account of the "hidden curriculum" (i.e., the attitudes and values that are implicit in any curriculum).
- It will exist in both a planned form and an experienced form and a gap may well exist between these.
- It will include both the formal curriculum (authorized institutionally in the form of timetabled lessons) and the informal curriculum (i.e., activities beyond the classroom).

Kelly was primarily thinking about schools in the state education system of the United Kingdom and so, arguably, his all-encompassing view of an educational curriculum is not suited to the more narrowly defined contexts for where specific purpose TBLT is obviously appropriate. TBLT, however, is now mandated in the state education systems of several countries in Asia (e.g., South Korea; Hong Kong; Vietnam) and elsewhere, where Kelly's broad notion of an educational curriculum is clearly relevant. Even in more narrowly defined contexts, much of what Kelly sees as essential in a curriculum is relevant. For example, should a program for the US Border Patrol (Gonzalez-Lloret & Nielson, 2015) concern itself solely with enabling its personnel to perform target tasks in Spanish or should it also address the socio-political issues embedded in these tasks? To a greater or lesser extent, the idea of an educational curriculum is of relevance in any context where TBLT figures.

I now briefly examine three general curriculum models. These models are well known but, in general, they do not figure in accounts of language teaching (but see White, 1988).

Curriculum as a product

When we view education as a technical exercise, the focus is on the specification of objectives and content. This is a view of education that drew on thinking about good business management (Bobbitt, 1918) and that became prevalent in the USA in the post-war years. Tyler (1949) proposed basing an instructional programme on behavioural objectives that specify the "changes to take place in students" (p. 44). Taba (1962) spelt out the steps needed to construct such a curriculum. I

provide this in full below because, as will be seen later, it has clearly informed not just the development of a traditional structural language teaching where objectives are specified linguistically but also task-based language teaching where the objectives are specified in terms of target tasks. Long (2015b) proposes a similar set of steps.

Table 1. Taba's procedure for a product-oriented curriculum

Step 1:	Diagnosis of need
Step 2:	Formulation of objectives
Step 3:	Selection of content
Step 4:	Organization of content
Step 5:	Selection of learning experiences
Step 6:	Organization of learning experiences
Step 7:	Determination of what to evaluate and the ways and means of doing it.

Smith (2000) noted, "the attraction of this way of approaching curriculum theory and practice is that it is systematic and has considerable organizing power" (p. 6). Central to the whole enterprise is the formulation of objectives. Both Tyler and Taba defined these tightly as 'behavioural objectives' but in fact objectives can be formulated in different ways. Eisner (1972; cited in White, 1988) distinguished three types: (1) instructional objectives are behavioural; (2) expressive objectives concern the students' creative response and cannot be specified behaviourally, and (3) objectives that refer to problems to be solved, leaving it up to student to find the solutions.

However, this means-ends view of a curriculum has a number of problems. Implicit in behavioural objectives is that it views learning as getting from A to B, which is the view that underlies structural language teaching. If we adopt Kelly's view of an educational curriculum, we have to see learning (including language learning) as something that broadens, deepens, enhances and enriches learners, not just as centring on achieving narrowly defined objectives. A means-end approach can avoid this stricture to some extent if we define the ends more broadly, as, for example, in terms of tasks. There are other problems, however. Taking the 'ends to be achieved' as the starting point does not allow learners any say in the design of the curriculum and runs the risk of positioning teachers as technicians whose job is to implement the teaching experiences that have been chosen and organized for them. Stenhouse (1975a) mounts a telling attack on the objectives model curriculum, arguing that it mistakes the nature of knowledge. He sees behavioural objectives as only having relevance for the 'training' of 'skills' and not for developing critical and creative thinking, so advocates for what he calls 'induction', which he considers the only true way to 'knowledge'.

Any curriculum needs to provide teachers with some kind of plan that can guide their teaching and any plan must include – implicitly or explicitly – a statement of objectives. One of the fundamental issues in the design of a TBLT curriculum is whether to frame the objectives in functional terms (i.e., as target tasks) or in terms of tasks of general educational value. In the case of the former, the curriculum-as-product model has relevance. For the latter, we need a different kind of model.

Process curriculum model

When the curriculum is viewed as a process rather than a product, there is no detailed *a priori* specification of objectives. Instead, the curriculum emerges through practice and can only be specified in full retrospectively. Of course, there must be some initial idea that can initiate practice. This is the 'curriculum' in Stenhouse's often-cited definition:

> A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.   (Stenhouse, 1975a, p. 4)

In other words, "a curriculum is a specification which can be worked to in practice" (Stenhouse, 1975b, p. 107). The only requirement is that the proposal must "express an idea or set of ideas with sufficient detail and complexity for the ideas to be submitted to the criticism of practice and modified by practice" (p. 107). For Stenhouse, then, a curriculum is simply a basis for initiating a curriculum-as-process. His rationale for such a curriculum lies in the importance he attaches to education as 'induction', which he saw as only successful "to the extent that it makes the behavioural outcomes of the students unpredictable" (Stenhouse, 1975a, p. 82).

Stenhouse argues that the obvious source of the initial proposal is teachers themselves. Teachers approach a particular teaching situation with the ability to think critically and an understanding of their role, which leads them to a proposal for action that is appropriate for their particular context. By putting the proposal to work in their own classrooms, teachers can assess its effectiveness and make modifications along the way. Just as "a recipe can be varied according to taste, so can a curriculum" (1975a, pp. 4–5). The curriculum proposal, then, is just a "provisional specification claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice" (p. 142).

Stenhouse's own 'Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP)' involving adolescent students in state schools in the UK serves as an example of a process curriculum. This collaborative project involved discussion-based teaching centring

on controversial issues related to themes such as work, education and war. The themes were chosen in accordance with what the team believed were educationally important, rather than just likely to be interesting to the students. Materials from a variety of sources (e.g., literature, social studies, journalism, and photographs) were made available as resources for teachers to select from. Stenhouse (1971) listed seven principles to serve as a guide to the pattern of teaching the project team hoped to develop, namely the need for negotiation and openmindedness. For example, one principle advised teachers to take a neutral stance on the controversial issues raised and another not to force students to a premature view about an issue.

In the process model, curriculum decision making is decentralized. It provides relatively little structure, emphasizing instead the importance of teachers working together to decide on the curriculum proposal, and then deciding how to handle this in their own classrooms. There is no pre-specification of outcomes but teachers are guided by a set of procedural principles, a willingness to evaluate and adapt content as the curriculum evolves, and a view of assessment as a "trial piece or endeavour" (1975a, p. 82). Research also plays a fundamentally different role in the curriculum-as-process model. Instead of informing the initial design of the curriculum as in the product-based model, it is integral to the implementation of the curriculum. Stenhouse emphasized the uniqueness of every classroom and saw the teacher as a researcher in his or her own classroom, experimenting with the implementation of a proposal and moulding it to fit the students.

There are some problems with the process model (Smith, 2000). There will be no uniformity in the experienced curriculum, but uniformity may be necessary in some situations. While emphasizing the need to take account of the instructional context, the process syllabus arguably fails to do so by ignoring the reality of many teaching situations, for example where students and parents place a high premium on exam success or where there is a need to consider students' progression from one level to another in a large program. The process model also very much depends on individual teachers' skills, but some teachers may need the safety net of a prescribed curriculum. Finally, although Stenhouse prized critical thinking, this did not include appraisal of how language reflects and maintains inequitable power.

There are clear similarities between Stenhouse's ideas and those of Breen (1984). In Breen's process syllabus, the syllabus serves as "a plan for *the gradual creation* of the real syllabus in the classroom" (p. 52; italics in original). Breen, however, did not link his proposal to a task-based approach, seeing the content of the syllabus (including structural content) depending on negotiation between teacher and students. Stenhouse's process syllabus is also clearly applicable to content-based language teaching. Stoller and Grabe's (1997) 'Six T's' framework,

for example, reflects much of his thinking. The starting point, as in the HCP is 'themes', which are then worked out in terms of 'topics', 'texts', 'tasks' and 'threads' (i.e., linkages to create curricular coherence).

Curriculum and critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy (CP) rests on the idea of 'praxis', which Freire (1970) defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Applied to curriculum theory, this means that the goal of education is twofold – to enable students to reflect on their world in order to understand how social, political and cultural structures can position and disempower people, and, crucially, to devise action to change these structures. The first of these goals has a central place in the process curriculum but the second is at best only weakly present. The dual goals are made clear in this quotation from Giroux (2013):

> ... critical pedagogy is not simply about the search for understanding and truth, because such a goal imposes limits on human agency, possibility, and politics. Critical pedagogy also takes seriously the educational imperative to encourage students to act on the knowledge, values, and social relations they acquire by being responsive to the deepest and most important problems of our times.
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> (p. 14)

As Pennycook (1990) noted, because the fundamental aim of CP is the empowerment of students, a language curriculum based solely on the development of functional language skills is inadequate.

Crookes (2013) noted that publications on CP address theory but have little to say about pedagogical practises and teaching activities. His own book, however, goes some way to describing what critical pedagogy involves. He draws on a range of sources, in particular Auerback and Wallerstein (1987); Freire (1973); Shor (1996), and Wallerstein (1983). Crooke does not spell out the steps involved in developing a curriculum but instead discusses important aspects of the CP approach. However, because my concern is with curriculum development, I will take the liberty of rearranging the aspects he talks about under four general headings: 'content', 'materials', 'methodology' and 'assessment'.

Needs analysis plays a crucial role in determining content. Freire, for example, describes how his own practice in a critical literacy program began with ethnographic observation and interviews with a group of target students whom he was living with. This revealed not just their language needs but also the students' "longings, disbeliefs, hopes and an impetus to participate" (Freire, 1973, p. 49). In other words, a needs analysis for CP goes beyond students' functional language needs to examine how communicative events position students inequitably,

how they respond to such events, and what actions they can take to empower themselves. As Benesch (1996) put it, a critical needs analysis must consider the target situation "as a site of possible reform" (p. 273). The content of a CP program, however, is the product of negotiation between teacher and students, as in Breen's (1984) process syllabus. The needs analysis (or 'listening stage' in Freire's approach) only provides an initial set of topics and issues, which teacher and student amend and add to as the program proceeds. A final important point about content is that while it can address academic themes such as race, gender, and social class with their "roots in formal bodies of knowledge" (Shur, 1992, p. 55), it can also draw on topical themes of immediate, local concern to students.

Crookes notes that published CP materials are few in number. One reason for this is publishers' reluctance to publish materials that challenge authority. Another reason is that in CP learners should produce their own materials. Crookes, however, acknowledges that many teachers will need the support of materials to help them get started with CP. The L2 examples he gives come from materials designed for immigrant students in the US (Wallerstein, 1983; Auerback &Wallerstein, 1987) and those used in South Africa at a time when that country was emerging out its apartheid years (Janks, 1993).

A key feature of CP materials is the use of 'codes', which Crookes defines as "a projective device which allows learners to articulate their own, somewhat unpredictable interpretation of a potentially problematic situation relevant to their life" (p. 60–61). In effect, a projective device sounds like a kind of opinion-gap task. A 'code' can take the form of a photograph, a drawing, a collage, a story, a written dialogue, a song, or even a movie. It should aim to represent the different sides of a single problem in the daily lives of the students. Crookes also notes that an alternative source of content for a CP course is existing curriculum materials remodeled to incorporate a socially informed critique.

Crookes points to a number of essential features of CP methodology. The teacher needs to demonstrate a democratic classroom management style (including a preparedness to subject classroom management itself to critique), a critical perspective (including a readiness to explore the teacher's own values), and the ability to negotiate content with students. Above all the teacher must engage in 'dialogue' with students because "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking" (Freire, 2000, p. 92). Crookes draws a distinction between 'discussion' and 'dialogue', the former referring to "general dialogical and group interaction" and the latter to interactions where "one person's language … encourages or presses another to consider the basis for their thinking" (p. 654). Crookes recognizes that CP methodology is likely to pose a challenge to many teachers. Students, too, may find democratic participation difficult, especially in contexts where they are used to the teacher as an authority figure.

Crookes suggests that it may sometimes be necessary to teach students how to behave critically and cooperatively.

Developing methods of assessment that are compatible with CP principles is clearly a challenge. Externally devised, standard assessment tasks are not appropriate. Ideally, how to assess needs to be the focus of 'dialogue' (i.e., negotiated), reflect the cooperative curriculum, include student-generated assessment tasks, encourage self-assessment, and involve narrative rather than numerical grading.

In general, CP has been advocated for second rather than foreign language situations and has involved groups of students who are socially disadvantaged (e.g., adult immigrants or indigenous minorities). Doubts must exist about its viability in contexts such as China, where Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines include mention of 'critical skills' but of the logical, analytical kind, not of the socially-minded kind intended in CP. In particular, the idea of promoting action in conjunction with understanding can be problematic. In such contexts, a more realistic approach might be 'critical language awareness', where the focus is on developing understanding of how language serves to position people, often to their disadvantage, as in Janks (1993) materials, rather than on taking action. There is no fully worked-out task-based CP curriculum framework and very little discussion of CP in TBLT circles. Crookes noted, however, that CP lends itself to a task-based approach. One way would be to first identify the target tasks that learners need to be able to perform – such as discussing a health issue with a medical practitioner – and then subjecting the tasks to critical scrutiny to identify how learners can challenge the way in which they find themselves positioned.

Task-based language teaching curricula

Having examined the major curriculum models in education, I turn now to look at four TBLT curriculum models.[3] What constitutes a task-based model is, of course, a site of some controversy. As we saw in the quotation from Baralt and Gomez (2017), one view is that it must necessarily involve a needs analysis of target tasks, with the implication that any curriculum that does not is not 'task-

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3. I have been selective in the curriculum models I discuss. I did not include Skehan (1998) because, although he has much to say that is relevant about how design and implementation variables affect the performance of tasks, he does not present a full curricular statement. The same applies to Robinson's (2015) SSARC model of pedagogic sequencing. This model provides a procedure for selecting and grading tasks in a syllabus but does not constitute a full curriculum model. There is a stronger case for including Nunan (1989), but his focus is more or less exclusively on the design of tasks rather than on a task-based curriculum.

based'. In many situations, the obvious way will be to conduct a needs analysis but there will be other situations where it will not be appropriate. I define TBLT as consisting of a curriculum built around tasks as workplans where there is a primary focus on meaning, a gap of some kind, learners have to use their own resources, and the outcome is communicative (Ellis, 2003). Like Long (2015a), I make a distinction between task-based and task-supported language teaching. In the latter, the curriculum revolves around linguistic features and tasks are simply devices for practising these features communicatively.[4] However, as will become clear when I outline my own curriculum (Ellis, 2003, 2019), even though task-based and task-supported are mutually incompatible as they draw on different theories of language learning, I do not see them as mutually excluding because the possibility exists for a modular curriculum that includes both.

The four models I have chosen all figure prominently in the TBLT literature but they differ in a number of significant ways. I will draw on a set of questions – six of a general nature and six relating to specific components of a curriculum – all derived from Kelly's (2009) account of educational curriculum models (see Table 1). I will follow the chronology in which the four models first appeared.

Table 2. Evaluating TBLT curricula: Some key questions

A.	General
	1. Is the curriculum model based on a particular disciplinary perspective?
	2. Does the curriculum model take account of the broad educational and moral dimensions of a curriculum?
	3. Does the model take account of the 'hidden curriculum'?
	4. Is the place of the TBLT curriculum within the 'total curriculum' considered?
	5. Does the model assume that curriculum decision making will be centralized or decentralized?
	6. What role does research play in the curriculum?
B.	Curriculum components
	1. How are learners' needs established?
	2. How are the aims/ objectives of the curriculum formulated?
	3. How detailed is the specification of the curriculum content?
	4. How detailed is the specification of the teaching methodology?
	5. Do students have a role in developing the curriculum?
	6. What is the view of assessment in the curriculum?

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4. This is a narrow definition of task-supported language teaching, one based solely on the organising unit of the syllabus. See Samuda and Bygate (2008) for a much broader definition of task-supported language teaching, where tasks are used "in different ways to serve different types of pedagogic purpose" (p. 212).

Prabu's (1987) communicational language teaching project

In his book *Second language Pedagogy*, Prabhu (1987) provides an account of the 'Communicational Language Teaching Project' (previously known as the 'Bangalore Project'). This took place in primary and secondary schools in southern India in the early 1980s with mainly post-initial students of English. It attracted a lot of interest in the UK because it offered an alternative communicative approach to the notional/ functional syllabus that was the focus of attention at that time.

Prabhu's aim was to report a project involving a novel curriculum built around tasks as an alternative to the Structural Oral Situational Method (a type of structural language teaching), which prevailed in schools in India at that time. He worked with a team of teacher trainers and teachers with specialist qualifications to develop tasks for use in a lesson consisting of two phases: First the teacher and the students worked together to perform a task and then the students completed a similar task individually. There was no direct teaching of language, but the teacher was expected to scaffold students' participation and to correct production errors in an implicit way. The students were assessed in terms of whether they had successfully accomplished the task outcome (i.e., with success defined as whether the solution was 50% correct).

Prabhu did not draw on any particular disciplinary perspective. Rather, the project drew on his own pedagogic intuition that acquisition could occur naturally in a classroom without direct instruction. He saw tasks as creating the conditions where learners had to communicate without "any deliberate regulation of the development of grammatical competence" (p. 2) and believed that this would be sufficient for language development to take place. Prabhu's focus was on both language development, which he viewed mainly in terms of grammar, and the advancement of reasoning ability, which he saw as important for language development.

The scope of the project was quite narrow. Understandably, it took no account of the broader issues that Kelly (2009) argued needed to be included in an educational curriculum as Prabhu was simply following the view of 'language teaching' as a self-enclosed curriculum area that was dominant at that time. Thus, the project did not seek to address moral or socio-political issues, no consideration was given to the 'hidden curriculum', there was no element of critical pedagogy, and there was no mention of how the task-based curriculum fitted into the school curriculum as a whole. Prabhu worked with his team to develop the curriculum with ordinary classroom teachers not being involved. Research played a formative role in that different tasks were tried out and the information obtained fed back into the ongoing development of the curriculum. There was also a formal evaluation

of the project (Beretta & Davies, 1985), although this was not an integral part of the curriculum planning.

There was no formal needs analysis. Prabu provides a list of the task-types used in the project but there is no explicit account of task selection. It is clear, however, that a guiding principle was that the tasks should relate to topics the students were familiar with (e.g., school timetables and the postal system). There was no *a priori* list of tasks. Rather, the tasks evolved as the project continued. There were several tasks for each topic with the tasks sequenced according to the increasing challenge they posed the students. The aim was to create a reasonable challenge that would initiate a process of logical thinking between teacher and students. The syllabus that Prabhu describes in his book is a retrospective one. Prabhu's idea of a syllabus was as an "operational construct" – "a form of support to the teaching activity that is to be carried out in the classroom and a form of guidance in the construction of appropriate lesson plans" (p. 86). He is very clear that a task cannot prescribe the activity that occurs when it is performed, so there were no narrowly specified objectives. Prabhu mentions a number of key methodological features – for example, the need for teacher-talk to be comprehensible and for incidental correction of errors. Assessment was formative and task-based. An implicit assumption, however, was the expectation that students would also be able to perform satisfactorily in traditional, summative tests.

Although there is no mention of Stenhouse, the education model that most clearly underlies the Communicational Language Teaching Project is the process curriculum. Prabhu's notion of the syllabus as an 'operational construct' is close to Stenhouse's idea of the curriculum as "a specification which can be worked to in practice". Like Stenhouse, Prabhu identifies a number of principles that guide the development and implementation of the curriculum. There are also aspects that diverge from the process syllabus, in particular, the *a priori* determination of what constitutes the solution of a task (i.e., 50% correct), the absence of any role for negotiation of content and methodology involving students, and the very teacher-centred nature of the initial phase of a lesson. These curricular features are more typical of a means-end view of curriculum but arguably fit well with the situational conditions of the project: the age of the students, their limited language proficiency, and the large class size.

Looking back at the 'Communicational Language Teaching Project' nearly 40 years later, I see it as a useful model for how to innovate language education with TBLT in a public school setting such as in India. There is, however, only limited evidence to show that the project was successful in achieving its main aim (i.e., the development of grammatical competence) (see Greenwood, 1985; Beretta & Davies, 1985). Prabhu always viewed the 'Communicational Language Teaching Project' as an exploratory attempt at introducing a radically different type of cur-

riculum into Indian state schools, not as a curriculum ready for India-wide use. Perhaps this is why he elected to work with team of well-trained, experienced teachers rather than typical classroom teachers. Long and Crookes (1992) criticized the failure to conduct a needs analysis and the lack of explicit criteria for sequencing tasks but these criticisms seem to assume Prabhu worked from a fully made *a priori* syllabus. In fact, the tasks were chosen as the project progressed, informed by a common-sense understanding of what the team thought would be meaningful content and a 'reasonable challenge' for the students and drawing on the team's ongoing experience of trialling tasks *in situ*. Such an approach avoids the problems of a means-ends approach to curriculum development but, like Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project, it depended very much on the expertise of the teachers involved.[5]

Long's task-based curriculum model

Long first published his version of TBLT in 1985 and developed it in a number of ways in subsequent years (Long, 1991, 2005; Long & Crookes, 1992; Long & Norris, 2000). Its fundamental feature, however, has remained the same: the use of needs analysis to identify the target tasks on which to base the curriculum for specific groups of L2 learners. A needs analysis is the "first step in course design" (Long, 2015a, p. 88). Target tasks are grouped into task types. For example, if the target tasks for a flight attendant involve 'serving breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinks and snacks', these can be grouped into the target task type of 'serving food and beverages'. The next step is the development of a sequence of pedagogic tasks based on the target types and sequenced in difficulty leading up to a full simulation of the target task. The syllabus, then, consists of a list of the pedagogic tasks corresponding to each task type (see Long, 2015a for a full account of this procedure).

Long also provides a description of the different types of pedagogic tasks that can be used, including examples of input-based tasks for beginner and output-based tasks for intermediate and advanced level learners, noting that "the best task-based materials are usually locally written and adapted by the teacher for use with his or her students" (p. 298). He also lists a set of methodological principles to guide the implementation of the tasks, emphasizing the need for teachers to take account of local conditions when acting on these principles. For example, "Provide Negative Feedback" (Methodological Principle #7) can be carried out

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5. Beretta (1990) conducted an evaluation of the 'Communicative Language Teaching Project' and found that the 'regular teachers' (as opposed to members of the project team) failed to demonstrate a clear understanding of task-based instruction.

in different ways (e.g., with recasts versus metalinguistic explanation) in accordance with the teacher's online assessment of what will work best for individual students. One principle, however, "Focus on Form" (# 7), which involves attracting (and sometimes directing) learners' attention to form as they communicate, is an essential feature of TBLT. Finally, assessment of learning is task-based with the criteria for successful performance based on how native speakers perform the target tasks. There is the additional possibility of adding ratings of general language use. Long's 2015 book provides the most comprehensive account of TBLT to date. It is, however, his particular version of TBLT.

I will comment on Long's model using the questions in Table 1. Long's disciplinary perspective is made very explicit. He draws on theory and research in SLA, more specifically on the psycholinguistic underpinnings of "a cognitive-interactionist theory of instructed second language acquisition". He also draws on education theory such as Dewey's (1938) views about the importance of experiential learning, to identify nine core principles "that constitute TBLT's progressive philosophical underpinnings" (p. 64), the most notable being *l'educacion integrale* (glossed as "educating the whole person", p. 65). Other principles relate TBLT to the fundamental features of an educational curriculum: individual freedom, emancipation, and egalitarian teacher-student relationships. However, it is the psycholinguistic rationale, not the educational one, that is central in Long's version of TBLT. The kind of needs analysis that Long advocates leads to tasks of a vocational kind, and in this respect, reflects what Stenhouse called 'training'. There is no obvious attention paid to learners' general intellectual or moral development. The L2 Methodological Principles draw entirely on psycholinguistic constructs taken from SLA. There is no real commitment to critical language pedagogy, even though the education principles that Long espouses would lend themselves to such an approach. The tasks that figure in Long's TBLT serve just as vehicles for developing a high level of functionality in an L2.

The hidden curriculum, as reflected in the criterion-referenced assessment scheme, is that there is a 'right way' to perform a target task, but the values this implies are never considered. Given the very high level of expertise needed to carry out a needs analysis, it is clear that the syllabus is the job of experts. Given that the model is for teaching adult specific purpose learners, there is arguably little need to consider how it would fit into the total curriculum of primary or secondary schools. Research underpins the whole model. Needs analysis is itself a form of research and Long provides a very detailed account of the kind of research required (see, for example, Long, 2015a and Serafini et al., 2015). Research is also required to address 'real issues' such as how to determine task complexity (Long, 2016). Needs analysis in Long's model is always something

done by outsiders: There is no mention of the role that might be played by teacher-practitioner research.

I now turn to consider the second set of questions in Table 1. As already noted, needs are established by means of needs analysis. Long (2015b) identifies the conditions for the successful adoption of his needs-based model: The students are homogeneous enough and in sufficiently large numbers, a throughput of students is stable, and learning a functional command of the L2 has to be important enough to justify the investment in time and money required. Such conditions must exclude the vast majority of L2 learners, especially those in foreign language learners in state schools. In essence, Long's TBLT assumes a means-end view of curriculum. The means are tasks, sequenced in complexity and leading up to a final task assessed in terms of criteria arrived at from native-speaker performance of the target task. In a sense, then, the objectives that underlie the whole curriculum are behavioural, although obviously very different from the behavioural objectives found in structural or notional/functional models of language teaching (cf. Steiner, 1975; Van Ek, 1975).

It would be wrong, however, to characterize the model as a typical product-based model. For a start, there is the assumption that in the process of mastering specific task behaviours, learners will also develop their interlanguages where the 'ends' cannot be specified as acquisition is a non-linear, organic process. Also unlike a typical product-based model, the teacher is not a technician implementing the syllabus following circumscribed procedures. There is no tight specification of the teaching methodology. Instead, Long emphasizes the need for teachers to have the freedom – guided by his L2 methodological principles – to decide on the moment-by-moment actions when performing a task. This view of task-based methodology is quite similar to that of Prabhu's and, to my mind, is fundamental in any task-based curriculum model.

Long's version of TBLT has been enormously influential, and rightly so. It is the most fully worked out account of a TBLT curriculum. From an SLA perspective, it is strong theoretically. Selecting 'task' as the organizing unit of the curriculum overcomes many of the problems associated with specific purpose language teaching (see Basturkmen, 2006). Long (2015a) also provides detailed and very practical accounts of how to design a task-based curriculum. The utility of the model is evident in the growing number of high-quality task-based courses involving needs analysis (e.g., Malicka et al., 2019; Serafini & Torres, 2015). Long acknowledges, however, that his model is best suited to tertiary level foreign language programmes (although I have my doubts about that), programmes for government, diplomatic, intelligence agency and military personnel, travel inducts and tourism, foreign language programmes for missionaries and volunteer organizations, and immersion/ bilingual schools. Lambert (2010) also showed the

utility of investigating the future needs of business and education students in a Japanese university, although many of the tasks he identified (e.g., translating documents; summarizing information) were of the kind found in courses not based on tasks. Needs analysis is best suited to students who have clear and immediate 'target tasks' as, for example, in an oral communication course for university students (Liakana & Michaud, 2018). A functionally oriented TBLT does not fit well with the educational needs (broadly defined) of the majority of the world's language learners.

Willis' framework for task-based learning

Willis approaches task-based language teaching from a very different perspective to Long. Whereas Long's training is in SLA, Willis' background is as a teacher and teacher trainer in a number of overseas countries and as researcher associated with work in corpus analysis at the University of Birmingham. The framework she proposed in her 1996 book (and elaborated in Willis & Willis, 2013) is generic in nature and suitable for general-purpose instruction. It is based on a set of beliefs about language learning that are spelt out at the onset of Willis' book (e.g. "Many secondary school students who have studied a foreign language leave school unable to communicate in it" (p. 4).

At the centre of the framework is the 'task cycle'. This consists of three phases. The 'pre-task phase' is where the "teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, helps students understand task instructions and prepare" (Willis, 1996, p. 38). There are three components to the second phase – the task cycle –, which is the core of the framework. In the 'task' component students do the task in pairs or small groups with the teacher's role restricted to that of monitoring performance, for example helping out if there is a communication breakdown and acting as a time-keeper. In contrast to Long, Willis proposes that teacher and students should only be concerned with meaning (i.e., there is no focus on form at this point). The second component is 'planning', when the students prepare an oral or written report of the outcome of their discussions, with the teacher now providing help with language. The third component is the 'report', when individual groups present the reports they have prepared to the whole class, with the teacher giving feedback on both content and form. The final phase of the framework is 'Language Focus', involving 'Analysis' where students examine and discuss specific features of their text or transcript of the recording and 'Practice', where learners rehearse new words, phrases and patterns that occurred in the data. Willis' provides detailed information about each phase along with suggestions for appropriate methodological strategies. The general principle that underlies the framework is "moving from language experience to language

analysis" (p.137). In this respect, Willis' TBLT is similar to Johnson's (1982) 'deep-end strategy'.

Willis' focus is on the methodology of a task-based lesson rather than the design of a task-based syllabus. It is, however, possible to glean Willis' general ideas about the latter. The starting point for a TBLT lesson is the choice of a topic, with the assumption that topics will be chosen that are familiar and of interest to students (e.g., family, homes, sea-journeys, phobias) or related to the students' specific purposes for learning a language. Tasks are based on the topics chosen. For example, for sea-journeys, students listen to a recording about a sea journey and then work in groups to tell each other their own stories. Willis' describes six different types of tasks (i.e., listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative). She provides examples of each of these types of tasks in an appendix. There is no discussion of task complexity and no suggestions for how tasks can be sequenced.

In what ways can Willis' framework be considered an educational curriculum? It is not based on any particular body of disciplinary knowledge. Rather in the tradition of British ELT, it is based on Willis' experience of teaching and of working with teachers with some insights from SLA. Willis identifies three 'essential' conditions for language learning (exposure, opportunity to use the L2, and motivation) along with one 'desirable' condition (instruction that affords opportunities to focus on form). The 'Cobuild English Course' (Willis & Willis, 1988), one of the few published courses that can claim to be task-based, drew on corpus linguistics to identify lexical content. The framework does not take account of broad educational or moral issues, although some of the topics chosen clearly lend themselves to doing do. There is no consideration of the 'hidden curriculum' (e.g., that the teacher should function more as a manager than as an instructor) and the framework exists in isolation from the students' wider school curriculum. Implicit in the whole book is the idea that teachers will plan and implement their own lessons using the information and suggestions that Willis provides as a guide. Experience and received views of good teaching (as reflected in the teacher guides mentioned in the suggestions for further reading) rather than research inform the book. There is no mention of teacher as a researcher.

When addressing the second set of questions in Table 1, it becomes clear that Willis' framework does not constitute a complete language curriculum. Nor was it ever intended to do so. There is no mention of 'needs' and no account of procedures for identifying topics and tasks. The aim is a very general one: "to create a real purpose for language use and provide a natural context for language study" (p.1). There is no mention of 'objectives' in the sample lesson plans provided in the appendix to the book. There are plentiful ideas for curriculum content but no systematic account. There are no suggestions for how students can be involved in

the development of a task-based course. However, Willis provides a rich specification of the teaching methodology. There is a brief suggestion about how to conduct classroom-based testing using tasks (pp. 143–144). Otherwise, there is very little discussion of assessment, except to acknowledge that teachers may be worried that TBLT does not prepare students for examinations and that it may be necessary to devote some time to exam preparation.

Because the focus of the book is on the methodology of TBLT, the overall curriculum remains implicit and sketchy. In particular, there is no explicit information about curriculum content – either what it is or how to arrive at it. Willis stated explicitly that syllabus-design was beyond the realm of her book. It is, therefore, difficult to say what type of curriculum it is. It is not objectives-based, nor is it an example of a process-model curriculum. The framework is pedagogically grounded and is best described as a 'how-to-do' TBLT for a general language course. Although published 25 years ago, it continues to be one of the most practitioner-friendly accounts of TBLT. Its value for teachers is evident in motivating teachers to conduct their own research into different aspects of TBLT (see Leaver & Willis, 2004, and Edwards & Willis, 2005).

Ellis' modular curriculum

My own ideas about a curriculum involving tasks were first formulated in Ellis (2003) and expanded in Ellis (2019). In Ellis (2003) I proposed that a task-based syllabus could consist of both unfocused tasks (i.e., tasks intended to elicit general samples of language use) and focused tasks (i.e., tasks designed to elicit the use of predetermined linguistic features). I saw the unfocused tasks as facilitating the development of implicit L2 knowledge and the focused tasks as directed at the development of explicit knowledge. Selection of unfocused tasks was based on task types (e.g., narrative versus argumentative) and themes/topics. Selection of unfocused tasks drew on a list of linguistic forms and/or functions. I envisaged two possibilities: a syllabus consisting entirely of unfocused tasks or a mixture of unfocused and focused tasks to introduce a focus on form into a meaning-centered curriculum.

To sequence unfocused tasks, I proposed a set of factors based largely on the work of Skehan (1998) and Robinson (2001). These factors addressed input (i.e., medium, code complexity, cognitive complexity, context dependency, and familiarity of information), task conditions (i.e., conditions influencing the negotiation of meaning, single versus dual task demands, and discourse mode), the process of performing a task (e.g., whether reasoning is needed), and task outcomes (i.e., the medium of the outcome, closed versus open outcomes, discourse domain, and outcome complexity). However, I argued that given the complex nature of tasks,

these factors can only serve as a guide and that sequencing was less a science than an art where teachers' experience counted most, in line with Prabhu's thinking. I proposed that the sequencing of focused tasks take account of grammatical complexity and suggested factors for grading grammatical items for teaching explicit knowledge (see Table 7.6 in Ellis, 2003).

In my 2003 book, I also advanced the possibility of a modular syllabus. This consisted of a communicative module of unfocused tasks and a code-based module involving focused tasks. I saw the communicative module as the primary component, especially in the initial phase of the curriculum, but continuing to occupy the larger space throughout. My idea was that the code-based module should commence only after learners had acquired a basic functional capacity in the L2 to counter the lack of learning that results from the failure to attend to less salient input cues for grammatical features such as English articles and 3rd person-*s*. The code base drew on a checklist of such linguistic features.

In Ellis (2019), I developed my ideas for a modular curriculum further. I took as my starting point Brumfit's (1984a) integrated curriculum model catering to 'fluency' and 'accuracy'. Brumfit argued that 'systematization', which he saw as an essential feature of any language curriculum, was only possible for the accuracy component by drawing on the descriptions of linguists. He commented "insofar as we wish to make our language teaching coherent to either learners or teachers" (p. 94), a linguistic syllabus is essential. In his model, accuracy has priority in the initial stages with fluency gradually assuming more space in the curriculum over time.

My own proposal differed from Brumfit's in two ways. First, I argued for a 'modular' rather than 'integrated' curriculum. Because the processes involved in developing explicit and implicit knowledge are different, I rejected any attempt to splice a structural component into a task-based component. Second, in line with the model I presented in Ellis (2003), I made the case for the task-based component taking precedence in the initial stages and the structural component assuming more importance later. I also presented ideas for the kinds of tasks that could be used in both components. For the task-based component, I argued that for a general language course 'interactional authenticity' rather than 'situational authenticity' (cf. Bachman & Palmer, 1996) is important and that task selection should be based on topics rather than target tasks. For the structural component, I proposed a checklist rather than a syllabus, with teachers left to decide which items to teach after noting the linguistic problems that their learners experienced when performing unfocused tasks.

In my 2003 book, I also discussed the methodology of task-based teaching in terms of lesson design and participatory structure (e.g., whole class, small group work, individual student), pointing to options for the pre-task, during-task and

post-task stages of a lesson. Like Long, I proposed a number of general principles that can guide methodological decision making (e.g., 'Establish clear goals for each task-based lesson", "Ensure that students are primarily focused on meaning when they perform a task" and "Provide opportunities for focusing on form"). In a separate chapter, I also dealt with task-based assessment, distinguishing the use of tasks in system-referenced and performance-referenced tests.

I did not consult work on curriculum studies in education. The rationale for my proposals came from SLA. Looking back, I can see that the curriculum I proposed was lacking in a number of ways. There was no attention to the intellectual and moral aspects of education and no awareness of the hidden curriculum. I was purely focused on developing a language curriculum and unaware of any need to demonstrate how it might fit into the wider school curriculum. I saw myself as outlining the general specifications for the design of a curriculum leaving teachers to draw on these specifications to develop their own curricula. The proposals I advanced were based mainly on experimental research investigating individual tasks. I made no mention of any role for practitioner research, although elsewhere (Ellis, 2015) I have presented the case for teachers researching their own tasks.

I saw the goal of a task-based curriculum as developing general language ability and for this reason proposed that content should be specified in terms of topic-based tasks[6] rather than target tasks. My suggestions for doing this, however, are sketchy except for the key idea that students should be consulted about their interests. In the modular curriculum objectives are framed in terms of tasks and in the structural component in terms of grammatical features selected from the checklist. I saw the structural component developing explicit knowledge that would help learners by facilitating noticing specific linguistic forms when they performed tasks from the task-based module. In the task-based component, like Long, I emphasize the importance of the teacher having the freedom to make *in situ* decisions. In the structural component, I point to the value of discovery, consciousness-raising activities aimed at metalinguistic understanding. I argue that such activities are tasks as I have defined them because they turn language features into topics to be talked about (rather than practised) and have statements of metalinguistic rules as their outcome (see Ellis, 1993). Like proponents of other TBLT models, I did not find a place for critical language pedagogy. Nor did I consider what role students could play in developing the curriculum. I saw assess-

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6. A reviewer questioned whether a task-based curriculum based on topics would end up any different from a traditional theme/topic-based curriculum. The answer is that the curriculum still has tasks as its organising principle, which a traditional curriculum does not. 'Topic' serves as the starting for developing tasks in much the same way as 'target tasks' serve as the basis for developing pedagogic tasks in Long's (1985) model.

ment as both formative and summative, with measurements based on both task accomplishment and ratings of general proficiency. In many respects, my modular curriculum was means-ends oriented, with the ends defined both broadly in terms of task outcomes and narrowly in terms of explicit knowledge of specific linguistic structures. In both the task-based and structural-based components, the teacher was much more than a technician.

General comment

This account of the four TBLT models indicates that they have paid almost no attention to work in curriculum studies in education. They exist in the narrow bounds of their subject (language teaching) and take no account of students' moral and intellectual development, education for membership of a participatory democracy, or the relationship of a language curriculum to the wider school curriculum. In particular, there is no attempt to take on board critical language pedagogy. The curriculum model that underlies the TBLT models is essentially the product-based model, with tasks serving as the means to achieve ends (i.e., the task outcomes). Only Prabhu's Communicational Language Teaching Project displays elements of a process model where the curriculum evolves through teaching, but even here the students play no constitutive role in developing the curriculum. However, in all the models the teacher is positioned as a free agent, guided only by general methodological principles.

Options in the design of a curriculum

I now turn to look at the options available in TBLT, drawing on differences in the four TBLT models and taking a broader educational perspective. I will structure my account of these options in terms of the curriculum design process as outlined in Nation and Macalister (2010).

Considering the environment

Environmental considerations influence which type of curriculum is feasible. As Brumfit (1984b) observed, "a syllabus is inevitably closely bound up with particular social and cultural settings" (p. 77). A curriculum is conformist where, for pragmatic reasons, situational factors (e.g., time available, class size, learners' survival needs, teachers' experience and training, high-stakes examinations) dictate the shape of the curriculum, and the curriculum becomes radical where for reasons of principle (for example, the need to take account of theories of lan-

guage learning) situational constraints are discounted in favour of innovation. In many instructional contexts, TBLT will constitute a radical curriculum. For example, in state schools in Asia, a structurally based, transmission-style curriculum is the norm even when a task-based approach has been officially mandated. As Shehadeh (2012) noted, the conditions and social practices of foreign language situations are different from those of second language contexts. In such contexts, a curriculum based solely on tasks, such as Prabhu's and Long's, is radically different from what teachers know and understand (Littlewood, 2014) and for this reason has little chance of being successfully implemented.[7] Just conforming to current practice, however, is not acceptable as it ignores the psycholinguistic realities of language learning and, as Willis noted, does not lead to communicative ability.

There is, then, a tension between what theory gives support to and what environmental constraints make feasible. What options are available in such a situation? Long (2015a) suggests that it may be necessary to start with task-supported language teaching as a lead-in to task-based instruction, but he acknowledges that TBLT is unlikely ever to replace a structural approach in some parts of the world. An alternative might be the greater flexibility afforded by Willis' and Ellis' proposals (and Brumfit's too) as these include the need for some direct teaching of linguistic forms alongside task-based instruction and, therefore, have conformist as well as radical elements. Only where the learners' survival needs are paramount and where situational constraints can be overcome is the radical shift to Long's version of TBLT the preferable option.

I have suggested that TBLT should take account of critical language pedagogy. However, the extent to which this is feasible will depend on environmental considerations. In Brazil, the guidelines for high school teaching highlight that learning a language should go beyond learning to communicate to focus on the development of citizenship by emphasizing the socio-political aspects of learning an additional language. Responding to this, da Silva (2020) developed a language course where tasks served as vehicles for reflecting critically about the representation of women in the world of work and for developing the linguistic skills required to take action to avoid gender-bias. Koeneda and Watanabe (2008) adapted Long's curriculum model to incorporate critical pedagogy, calling it 'Task

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7. An unduly bleak view of the likelihood of TBLT taking root in Asian contexts may not be justified. Lai (2015) warned against "essentialist statements about cultural inappropriateness of TBLT in Asia" (p.14). Harris (2018) reported that Japanese teachers working in a variety of instructional contexts (including public schools) held positive views about implementing TBLT even while recognizing the problems involved. They noted, however, that the teachers saw a need for a 'weaker' form of TBLT.

Based Critical Pedagogy' (TBCP). They developed supplementary materials for first year Junior High School students in Japan: Based on the general theme of 'conflicts in friendship', they tackled 'bullying', a problem in some Japanese schools. Riestenberg and Sherris (2018) demonstrated the applicability of a critical perspective in a task-based course aimed at language revitalization of indigenous languages. There are issues that lend themselves to TBCP even in contexts where socio-political conditions may make it difficult to address disempowerment. However, there are also critical issues that will be difficult to address in some instructional contexts.

Discovering needs

Nation and Macalister suggested two ways of tackling needs. The first is to carry out a formal needs analysis to identify what learners need to learn, what they currently lack, and what they want to learn. As we have seen, Long's version of TBLT places needs analysis at the heart of his curriculum model but, as I have already noted, such an approach may not be appropriate if the learners have no obvious functional needs for learning the language. An alternative approach, evident in the proposals of Prabhu, Willis, and Ellis, is to base the curriculum on themes and topics deemed motivating and educational (see Bourke (2006) for a suggestion of how this can be done). Fact-finding still has a place, but it will be directed at identifying learners' 'interests' rather than their 'needs' and it will need to be supplemented with topics and issues of educational value. A third possibility, very relevant in situations where the target language is the medium of instruction in the total curriculum, is to select topics taken from the general school curriculum as in content-based/ content and language-integrated language instruction.

Following principles

Nation and Macalister comment, "it is very important that curriculum design makes the connection between research and theory of language learning" (p. 5). The problem is that there no agreed theory of language learning and different theories support very different types of curriculum. A theory that views language learning as skill learning (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998) supports a curriculum based on linguistic content and uses focused tasks as devices for practicing target forms in a communicative context. The result is a task-supported curriculum. A theory that views implicit language learning as non-linear and "the default learning mechanism" (Long, 2015a, 43) rejects the need for explicit language instruction in favour of an approach where tasks serve as the unit for planning a curriculum. These theories are incompatible but this does not mean that a curriculum cannot

draw on both if the activities based on each are kept separate as in my modular curriculum.

SLA is the primary source of the principles that inform TBLT but there are other sources. I have spent considerable time in this article arguing for an educational perspective as well. Attending to students' intellectual and moral development and to the place of the TBLT curriculum in the total curriculum are important principles. In this respect all four TBLT curriculum models are lacking as, arguably, is the field of language teaching as a whole. One obvious way forward is to rethink TBLT in terms of the principles that inform 'induction' (Stenhouse, 1975a) and 'praxis' (Freire, 1970).

Determining goals

If goals are framed in terms of training, they will focus on the functional needs of learners, as in specific purpose language teaching. Widdowson (1983, p.7) argued that in this case the focus is on developing a 'restricted competence' that can be achieved within the period of the course. In contrast, if the goals are framed in terms of education, it becomes necessary to take account of the abilities that will allow the learner to adjust to changing circumstances, that is, the development of a 'general capacity'. Widdowson wrote:

> A person educated in a certain language, as opposed to one who is trained only to use it for a restricted set of predictable purposes, is someone who is able to relate what he or she knows to circumstances other than those which attended the acquisition of that knowledge.   (p.17)

In Long's TBLT, the focus is on training and the development of the restricted competence needed to perform the target tasks identified in a needs analysis. The objectives are behavioural (i.e., performing a target task to criterion level). However, the cognitive-interactionist theory that informs Long's model sees interaction as broadly facilitating acquisition and thus as contributing to 'general capacity'. Long's model, therefore, has both training and general capacity as its goals, although we might ask whether the focus on training limits the development of general capacity. Prabhu, Willis and Ellis are concerned solely with the development of a general capacity. The tasks in their models involve what Eisner called 'expressive objectives' involving creativity and his Type III objectives involving problem solving. Missing from these models, however, is any concern for the development of a critical capacity, which I have argued is necessary when we take a broader educational perspective. This will require a particular type of Type III objectives based on problematic situations in the lives of the students and the actions they can take to remedy them. There are, then, three general goals

relating to functional ability, general capacity, and critical capacity. We should ask what place each of these goals has in a TBLT curriculum.

Selection and sequencing of content

In a task-based curriculum, content is necessarily specified in terms of meaning rather than form but there is also the option to include a linguistic specification. In other words, the curriculum can consist of focused tasks, unfocused tasks, or a mixture of both. Another option is whether the selection of content takes place before teaching starts or while it is underway (i.e., whether the syllabus is product- or process-based). Willis had little to say about syllabus design, so I will focus on the options evident in the models of Prabhu, Long and Ellis. Table 3 summarizes the main options in their models in terms of their goals, the specification of content, the type of tasks, and the type of syllabus.

Table 3. Options in a task-based syllabus

TBLT model	Prabhu	Long	Ellis
Goal	General capacity	Functional capacity; general capacity	General capacity
Specification of content	Meaning – themes and related topics based on areas of student lives.	Meaning – derived from a needs analysis of target tasks	Meaning – themes and topics based on students' interests; form – a checklist of problematic linguistic features.
Type of task	Unfocused tasks	Unfocused tasks	Unfocused and focused tasks
Type of syllabus	Largely process	Product	Product (meaning content); process (linguistic content)*

* In my modular syllabus. I view the linguistic content as not pre-determined but selected by observing gaps in the students' use of the L2. For this reason. I consider it part of a process-curriculum.

Sequencing content remains one the problematic aspects of TBLT (see Long, 2016; Ellis, 2017). A general principle is that easy tasks should be performed before difficult tasks. This requires being able to identify what makes a task easy or difficult. As I noted when presenting the TBLT models, various factors have been identified as potentially affecting the complexity of tasks. There is a fair degree of consensus about what these factors are. The problem is that any one task is comprised of a cluster of factors, which potentially interact in uncertain ways to determine its complexity. For example, a task may be deemed 'simple' because

it involves relatively few information elements but 'difficult' if the information is unstructured. How, then, can we decide on the complexity of such a task? In my modular curriculum, I argued that it might be useful for teachers to draw on a list of factors such as that in Robinson (2001), but ultimately the sequencing of tasks is an 'art' that draws on teachers' experience of working with tasks of different kinds with different groups of learners.

However, I would like to refer readers to Mohan et al. (2015), who identify one factor that they see as key in determining task complexity: context embeddedness. They describe a sequence of tasks linked to topics drawn from the school curriculum (e.g., learning about magnetism), where there is a progression from context-embedded to context-free language use in tasks requiring action, reflection and explanation (in that order), each necessitating a different type of discourse with distinctive lexico-grammatical resources. The language curriculum that Mohan et al. describe has a number of advantages. Sequencing is relatively straightforward as it concerns only a single factor (i.e., context-embeddedness). The language curriculum links with the wider school curriculum. It addresses students' functional needs and the development of general capacity. It addresses students' general cognitive development, a requirement of a truly educational curriculum.

Some critics of TBLT have argued that it is not possible to construct a syllabus based on tasks because the activity that results from a task is always unpredictable (Seedhouse, 2005). This, however, seems to me a fundamental misunderstanding. The whole point of tasks is that they give the teacher and students the freedom to make them come alive and thus do not prescribe what language to use. Teachers, however, need a proposal to work from, as Stenhouse (1975b) noted, and in TBLT the proposal takes the form of tasks.

Finding a format and presenting materials

When TBLT first appeared on the scene, it was seen as blurring the traditional distinction between syllabus and methodology (Nunan, 1989). Subsequently, however, it became clear that 'task', while having implications for lesson design and teaching strategies, was in fact independent of them. Nation and Macalister (2010) point out the advantage of having a set lesson format, which is especially desirable if teachers have had no prior experience of TBLT. Prabhu proposed a two-phase format consisting of a pre-task phase where the teacher performs a task with the whole class and a second main phase where students perform a similar task individually. In Long's model, there is a sequence of tasks starting with input-based tasks to provide extensive exposure to the target language, followed by increasingly complex output-based tasks performed in groups, and concluding with a practice task that is a close approximation to the target task. Long also allows for

post-task feedback on language problems. Willis, as we saw, proposes a fixed format consisting of pre-task, a task cycle involving performing a task in groups and then reporting on it, and language focus. Ellis' format consists of pre-task, during-task and post-task phases. Despite the apparent differences, the formats of the four models are really quite similar. In all of them, there is some kind of preparation phase, a task performance phase, and a follow up phase. Prabhu's format is fixed but the other models allow for considerable flexibility in the design of individual lessons. Ellis, for example, noted that lessons can consist of all three stages, of just the during-task phase, of a pre-task + during-task phase, or during-task phase + post-task phase.

In TBLT, the primary focus is on processing language for meaning. Unsurprisingly, therefore, all four models reject the explicit teaching of grammar in the pre-task phase, although both Willis and Ellis suggest that some direct teaching of vocabulary can be helpful. All four models also describe the teacher's main role as that of co-communicator in the during-task phase. There are, however, some notable methodological differences in the models. Prabhu, for example, rejects small group work. In contrast, in Willis' model it is ever-present. Long and Ellis also recognize its importance but also see a need for tasks performed in a teacher-class participatory structure. Differences are also evident in how form should be addressed. Prabhu, Long and Ellis all favour focus-on form while a task is being performed; Willis, however, argues that learners should feel free to use language without fear of making errors. A key feature of focus on form is corrective feedback. For Prabhu and Long corrective feedback is incidental, triggered by whatever linguistic problem happens to occur in learners' production. For Ellis, it can be incidental but needs to address the target structure of a focused task proactively. For both Prabhu and Long, focus on form is invariably reactive, but Ellis also recognizes pre-emptive focus on form, noting that this occurs naturally in task-based lessons. Prabhu and Long favour implicit, input-providing corrective feedback; Ellis sees merit in the use of a wider set of corrective strategies, including metalinguistic explanation. Ellis et al. (2002) provides a comprehensive description of focus-on-form strategies. Arguments supported by research exist for these different options but are not conclusive. My purpose here is simply to document them.

Assessment

Assessment is an essential feature of any curriculum, but often teachers have little say in it. Even if they try introducing TBLT, their students may still have to sit traditional tests. Ideally, assessment should be performance-based. In Long's model, assessment is directed at measuring the development of specific abilities along

with general aspects of language production such as complexity, accuracy and fluency, using tasks derived from the target tasks identified in the needs analysis. In Ellis' model, assessment can also include measuring task outcomes but because the aim is the measurement of learners' general capacity, it will also involve ratings of aspects of language use such as complexity, accuracy and fluency (Skehan, 2001). A problem that continues to plague the development of task-based achievement tests is the lack of an agreed task-difficulty metric (but see Skehan & Luo's (2020) recent proposal for such a metric).

The chief options for assessment, then, are whether to rely entirely on the direct assessment of task outcomes or (in addition) on ratings of general aspects of the language use elicited by a task. Other forms of assessment – for example, portfolios and self-assessment – are also highly compatible with TBLT, especially when the assessment is formative. It may also be necessary in some situations to accept traditional forms of testing. Arguably, if TBLT is successful in developing a general capacity, learners will be successful in traditional tests as well as in task-based ones. However, it may be difficult to convince teachers of this. Finally, there is the question of how to include a critical perspective into task-based assessment but I have not found any proposals regarding this.

Program evaluation

Both Long and Ellis emphasize the importance of evaluating TBLT programs in order to determine whether, and to what extent, the curriculum has succeeded in achieving its goals and in how to improve it for future use. A program evaluation can make use of the task-based assessments of learning outcomes, but it will need to go beyond these to examine through observation whether the program was implemented in accordance with the principles and procedures of the TBLT model, and also, through interviews and questionnaires, the opinions of teachers and students. It will also be important to adopt a critical perspective on evaluation especially when the program involves participants facing crucial issues relating to power and subject positioning as, for example, in the work of border patrol personnel (Gonzalez-Lloret & Nielson, 2015).

A sound program evaluation will involve triangulation of data collected in different ways. There is also a need for the micro-evaluation of individual tasks (Ellis, 2015) to determine to what extent the tasks 'worked' in the ways expected. A number of evaluation studies (see Chapter 11 in Long (2015a) and Chapter 11 in Ellis et al. (2020)) have identified a range of problems that emerge when implementing TBLT, which can inform the development of teacher-preparation programmes.

Conclusion

One of my aims in this article was to present the case for a broad view of TBLT. Long distinguishes lower case 'tblt' and upper case 'TBLT' with needs analysis as an essential feature of the latter. In effect, then, Long's TBLT is restricted to special-purpose teaching and has a training function. What I see as more relevant is the potential of TBLT, broadly defined, to facilitate the development of a general language capacity. Interestingly, Bryfonski and McKay's (2017) meta-analysis of classroom-based TBLT studies compared studies with and without needs analyses, reporting that the latter far exceeded the former and had a greater overall effect on learning. However, any version of TBLT – including Long's – caters to the development of a general capacity, and so what distinguishes the different versions is whether the goal is both restricted ability and general capacity (as in Long), or just a general capacity (as in Prabhu, Willis and Ellis). In contexts where it is possible to identify learner needs and where learners' lives may well depend on functional language skills a training version of TBLT has obvious merit, although the narrow focus on needs may impede the development of a general capacity. In many instructional contexts – probably the majority – where the goal is the development of communicative competence for future rather than immediate use, a general-purpose version of TBLT fits best.

To my mind, the fundamental strength of TBLT lies in its flexibility to adjust to different instructional contexts. This flexibility is evident in a whole range of options found at both the design and implementation levels of a task-based curriculum. I have identified some of the main options. Some of them are the focus of disputation, in particular, whether there is any place for explicit instruction. Controversy is to be expected given that TBLT is still a work in progress (Long, 2015). At this stage of its development, we should remain open-minded, research options systematically and, most importantly, encourage teachers to experiment in their own classrooms with both design and implementation options.

My second main aim in this article was to propose that TBLT would benefit from adopting an educational perspective by drawing on work in curriculum studies. Language teaching theorists have been narrowly focused on their own subject, they have looked primarily to SLA to provide a rationale for TBLT, and they have taken little note of the insights to be gained from a broad educational perspective. Several points that emerge from this perspective are worthy of consideration in the road ahead:

1. Above all, the importance of environmental factors in determining what version of TBLT is best suited to a particular instructional context.

2. Selecting tasks and making methodological choices that help to promote learners' intellectual development as well as their L2 development. This point is as relevant to a training model as to a general-purpose model of TBLT.

3. Selecting tasks and making methodological choices that help learners to develop the ability needed to examine how language can empower and disempower and, where appropriate, to be able to take action to enhance social equitability.

4. The utility of involving teachers in the development of all levels of a task-based curriculum.

5. Always, giving precedence to the development of a general language capacity. This will mean that pedagogic tasks are never only the means for mastering the performance of some pre-determined target task.

6. In the case of state educational systems, considering how the TBLT curriculum relates to and helps support the goals of the wider curriculum.

7. Recognizing the importance of learners' prior experience of the world and their personal interests.

8. Recognizing the limitations of outsider, 'expert' research and placing greater store on local, practitioner research.

9. Ensuring that the method of assessment is fully in tune with TBLT goals.

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Publication history