

FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

Heidi Byrnes's essential bookshelf: Curriculum

Heidi Byrnes 

Georgetown University, Washington, USA

Email: byrnes@georgetown.edu

(Received 14 October 2022; accepted 19 October 2022)



Heidi Byrnes is George M. Roth Distinguished Professor of German Emerita at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, where she was a faculty member for 38 years. Her interest is in all aspects of how adult instructed foreign language learners attain advanced levels of performance that allow them to use their multi-lingual/multicultural abilities in a variety of professional settings. Curricular thinking plays an important part in that quest. She is a past president of AAAL, past Editor of the *Modern Language Journal*, and is the recipient of numerous professional association awards.

Knowledge about curriculum development in collegiate foreign language (FL) departments tends to be limited, especially when it is defined as the long-term development of the FL over the course of an entire instructional program as contrasted with individual courses. That assessment, along with the belief that curriculum development is a highly situated enterprise, has shaped my essential bookshelf. It privileges influences in my personal-professional time and place within prevailing disciplinary and language education policy interests in the United States (U.S.).

With regard to time, the four decades from the 1980s onward, the core of my professional life, were a particularly vibrant period for the language profession as it shifted from a structuralist grammar-driven and knowledge-based understanding of language learning for the few to a performance- and interactive communication-oriented understanding for the many. Known in the U.S. as the proficiency movement, my extensive engagement in its initially oral proficiency assessment-oriented efforts included first lessons on the intricacies of curriculum construction.

With regard to place, I occupied an unusual “professional Third Space”. On the one hand, all faculty in my Ph.D. granting German department at Georgetown University (GUGD) considered sophisticated FL abilities indispensable, acknowledged that long time periods were needed for its development, and accepted active engagement in such work as their professional responsibility. Such a consensus is unusual for graduate departments where a focus on scholarship in cross-disciplinary literary-cultural studies with its focus on narrative texts and their interpretive treatment of human experience in the linguistic and cultural environments of its language area more often than not becomes a program’s near-exclusive guiding ethos and intellectual commitment.

On the other hand, my own discipline, applied linguistics, had a decidedly short-term vision in how it framed and conducted its empirical research. Not only did it seem uninterested in the complexities that characterize long-term learning in an educational setting such as mine, but pursuit of its own disciplinary agenda almost seemed to preclude that kind of engagement. In any case, when educational issues were addressed, research inquired into learning English as a second or foreign language in environments that showed little resemblance to the demands collegiate FL instruction in general, my program in particular, needed to meet.



This was my dilemma: recommendations for curriculum construction in collegiate FL departments would be useful and usable to the extent that they integrated the teaching of content, culture, and language over a four-year span and recognized their academic nature; and, as far as I could determine, applied linguistics could offer little guidance in that direction. That suggested a two-pronged strategy: reflecting my professional identity, I would continue to seek, within the theoretical and empirical literature of Anglo-American applied linguistics, suitable innovative thinking. But if that should prove unsuccessful, I would look beyond for the simple reason that any curricular innovation in my department had to reflect the scholarly commitments of my colleagues in literary-cultural studies. I anticipated both the need for much “translation” work between the two disciplinary discourses as well as the likelihood that my own thinking might no longer align with the dominant applied linguistics orthodoxies.

My essential bookshelf reflects this negotiation; I suspect that other applied linguists working within a literature department face similar issues. Language teaching and learning dominate in my selections. But they are reimagined in an intellectually capacious, challenging, and multifaceted environment that invites the creative engagement of all members of a diverse department. I understand that intellectual excitement and diversity of perspectives are not attributes typically associated with curriculum creation. However, over the years, I have come to appreciate even more that a curriculum is a pivotally important statement by an entire faculty group of the educational values it holds, seeks to realize in its work, and can rely on for both internal and external accountability and professional-academic identity.

Three sections organize my selection: identifying key issues, embracing a genre-based, task-oriented curriculum, and considering further implications.

Identifying key issues

(1) MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. (2007). Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world. *Profession '2007*, 234–245.

Emphasizing the contextual nature of curricula, my first selection is a report created by a committee of the Modern Language Association (MLA), the leading professional organization in literary cultural studies. Its authors urgently call for eliminating the existing conceptual and administrative bifurcation of collegiate FL departments as a precondition for reaching their academic-educational goals and forcefully advocate for integrated four-year curricula toward high-level language and cultural knowledge.

Having worked with the MLA over several summers in professional development institutes intended to foster what was called proficiency-oriented “language” instruction that included the first two years of college, I enthusiastically welcomed this high-powered report. Also, it was gratifying to see that, ten years after the GUGD had initiated its curricular reform, a key professional organization in so many ways validated our work. More importantly, the document held out the promise of reconfiguring collegiate FL programming and instruction profession-wide, comprehensively, and in an intellectually inviting fashion.

Alas, despite the report’s remarkably laudatory resonance (my edited “Perspectives” column in the *Modern Language Journal*, is just one of many treatments, Byrnes, 2008), wide-spread professional enthusiasm did not engender substantive program transformation, much less curriculum building: what was roundly critiqued 15 years ago largely remains in place today, much to the detriment of collegiate FL instruction in the U.S. that, perhaps, is even under greater threat now than it was then.

So, why include the report in my selection and, more specifically, what lessons are to be learned? While many factors come into play, I see these key issues: (1) it is questionable whether a stark dichotomy can and should be established between a principally instrumental, skill-oriented notion of language as a means for communicating thought and information and an understanding of language “as an essential element of a human being’s thought processes, perceptions, and self-expression” (p. 235); (2) while one can debate whether translingual and transcultural competence best express the goals of collegiate FL programs, they can only be attained when these programs accept the

responsibility of fostering advanced-level L2 linguistic competence, something that requires careful vertical articulation from kindergarten to graduate programs; and (3), and perhaps most consequentially, given that collegiate FL programs generally lack the internal intellectual and procedural resources required for substantive curriculum development, a well-funded, well-supported, and well-orchestrated faculty development effort is indispensable if curricular reform is to take place in graduate FL departments with their complex power dynamics. As I had directly experienced, exactly that kind of engagement on the part of the MLA together with the National Endowment for the Humanities had taken place in the late 1980s and early 1990s and succeeded in ushering in proficiency-oriented language teaching in the U.S.

Including this report in my bookshelf is a way of highlighting the fact that unequivocal and sustained professional-organization support for the numerous challenges FL departments face as they contemplate curricular reform is a task yet to be met by both applied linguistics and literary-cultural studies.

(2) Long, M. H., & Crookes, G. (1993). Units of analysis in syllabus design: The case for task. In G. Crookes & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Tasks in a pedagogical context: Integrating theory and practice* (pp. 9–54). Multilingual Matters.

My next selection is a seminal article by Long and Crookes that lays out key issues for curriculum development as identified in applied linguistics, specifically the central importance of a syllabus's underlying unit of analysis in order to support the indispensable decisions regarding selection, grading, and sequencing of instructional activities.

Selecting “task” as the preferred unit of analysis to this day has had an extraordinary impact on the way language teaching and learning has come to be conceptualized and implemented. Especially influential has been the distinction between synthetic and analytic syllabuses and, beyond curricular matters proper, a plethora of recommendations for task-based language teaching (TBLT).

For me personally, “task” expanded horizons and gave scholarly heft to the more practice-oriented proficiency movement to which I had already devoted considerable energy. However, I also took a cautionary stance toward a task-based approach to curriculum development on at least two counts: first, a stint in upper administration familiarized me with the diverse ways in which academic programs across Georgetown University's main campus conceptualized and delivered their programs; and, second, the opportunity during a subsequent sabbatical for in-depth reading further crystallized the theoretical and practice-oriented needs that a collegiate FL program such as ours would be expected to meet to be deemed academically substantive. Both considerations became part of the stem-to-stern revamping of the GUGD's undergraduate curriculum agreed to in a unanimous faculty decision in February 1997; it ushered in the department's three-year period of curriculum development, from 1997–2000.

What concerns about college FL curriculum development did this article raise for me then and how do they influence to this day how the profession does—and does not—address matters of curriculum? First off, at the level of terminology, “syllabus” targets a single bounded course in an unspecified educational setting, not a multi-year curriculum in an academic setting. Second, much as syllabus/curriculum and pedagogy are intricately linked, in the end “task” is a construct for organizing a pedagogy that claims to be able to overcome a now rejected focus on grammar; it has limited use for syllabus, much less for genuinely longitudinal curriculum construction.

In short, I would need to look elsewhere—except for this: in the Anglo-American context, not only was there no “elsewhere”, but also the arguments set forth in the article firmly occupied and continue to occupy this scholarly territory with remarkable staying-power. That means that anyone doing curriculum development must wrestle with issues raised by the article. First, the up-front needs analysis that the article identifies as indispensable will have to be translated into the environment of academic programs. Second, the challenge of differentiating tasks by their difficulty, a requirement for sequencing decisions, will be heightened dramatically for a four-year program, far beyond the hurdles the article identifies even for such delimited tasks as training flight attendants. This is particularly true in a program that moves a diversity of students from *ab initio* learning to academic performance levels.

Can “task” meet that challenge? Third, collegiate FL programs must not only find ways of offering academically valued content—something that the curriculum-oriented use of task has yet to consider—but also, to bolster their claim to academic merit as contrasted with narrow skill-training, college programs must address the fundamentally language-based nature of knowing that is near-definitional for any educational settings, and especially for FL departments. Finally, the article makes very clear that the pedagogy that TBLT privileges builds on an extraordinary belief in the fixity of instructed L2 development, here referred to as a learner-internal syllabus that is largely immune to formal instruction. That assumption is expressed with a remarkable level of confidence in the discipline’s ability to determine the details of fine-grained manipulation for greater efficacy of learning. In my many years of university-level teaching, I have found neither theoretically plausible nor experientially observed nor empirical research-supported evidence for these beliefs. To me, that remains a conflict that TBLT research needs to address in order to buttress its recommendations for curricular decision-making.

(3) Baralt, M., Gilabert, R., & Robinson, P. (2014). An introduction to theory and research in task sequencing and instructed second language learning. In M. Baralt, R. Gilabert, & P. Robinson (Eds.), *Task sequencing and instructed second language learning* (pp. 1–34). Bloomsbury.

Just how vexing issues such as these remain is well illustrated by my next selection. It summarizes key claims for how a task-based instructional sequence, whether we call it syllabus or curriculum, should be organized. Specifically, the article traces, discusses, and ultimately rejects several other proposals for task design and sequencing and offers in their stead a detailed treatment of Robinson’s Triadic Componential Framework for designing and classifying tasks in his updated stabilize, simplify, automatize, reconstruct, and complexify (SSARC) model. This is an approach that Robinson, one of the co-authors and a prolific proponent of task for syllabus development, has championed over many years and has imbued with considerable theoretical heft and discursive power by giving privileged status to the cognitive complexity of tasks expressed in terms of processing demands: it becomes THE decisive factor for syllabus construction. Postulating a distinction between resource-directing vs. resource-dispersing variables as a way of accounting for both development and accuracy, the article lays out some of the central tenets of cognitivist pedagogies as they relate to task.

Neither authentic language use nor meaning are at issue. More seriously, neither syllabus nor curriculum design are substantively addressed despite frequent mention. Paramount, instead, is a proposal for an L2 pedagogy that progresses from stabilizing and simplifying, automatizing, and ultimately restructuring the complexity demands of pedagogical tasks seen entirely from a psycholinguistic processing perspective.

The article serves to illustrate particularly well how “task”, over time, has come to be reshaped from an education-oriented construct into a theoretical construct with an exclusively cognitivist-psycholinguistic and scientized orientation. As Editor of the *Modern Language Journal* until 2017 and as someone interested in long-term writing development in FL settings, I can attest to the continued—and to me deeply disturbing—prominence of that interpretation as a basis for organizing curricula: a starkly decontextualized understanding of task claims to be able to inform and govern a highly contextualized and highly complex environment for educational decision-making. The issue is not that theorizing and empirically researching “task” cannot and should not be refined; rather, the question is whether research has an ethical obligation to be responsive to the social contexts it seeks to illuminate.

Embracing a genre-based, task-oriented curriculum

My next six selections retrace the conceptual and practical underpinnings that I have found most conducive to creating a comprehensive collegiate instructional framework, with curriculum at its center. I am persuaded that “genre” is better suited to serving as the unit of analysis for curriculum building

than a narrowly conceived notion of “task”. In that case, long-term language development can be seen as an expansion of users’ meaning-making resources in an array of oral and written genres. “Task” is retained, but serves as a supportive pedagogical construct. The result is a comprehensive and integrated genre-based and task oriented approach to language instruction, from the very beginning to academic-level performance. There is ample evidence that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a social-semiotic, functional theory of language that considers meaning-making as driving language systems as well as learner development, is particularly well suited to such educational interests. The following selections explore relevant insights.

(4) Martin, J. R. (2009). Genre and language learning: A social semiotic perspective. *Linguistics and Education*, 20(1), 10–21.

My first entry in this section lays out the argument made in SFL for using genre to organize curricula. That potential exists because the theory conceptualizes genre in language-based ways; that is, it provides theoretically grounded, detailed form–function analyses of the entire lexicogrammatical system of a language, initially through the construct of register, subsequently through the explicitly textually oriented notion of genre (see Flowerdew’s, 2002, discussion of linguistic vs. nonlinguistic approaches to genre).

While functional, as contrasted with grammatical, approaches to language analysis are inherently attractive to collegiate FL departments with their strong meaning orientation, the insight that initially was conceptually revelatory but gradually became not only persuasive but also indispensable for my colleagues was SFL’s intrinsic understanding of the semiotic system language, rather than merely claiming, as is typically done, a pragmatic, contextual metafunctionality (for an in-depth discussion, see Martin, 1991).

I have selected Martin’s article as the first SFL entry to convey to readers its pivotal importance for curriculum development: without a principled link between language use and meaning and language form, decisions about instructional sequencing will remain piece-meal, opportunistic, or, at best, aspirational. By contrast, the article lays out theoretical considerations that enable analysis of a language system in relation to its social-situational context of use. At the same time, it explores implications of such a stance for a comprehensive approach to language and literacy education, including native and other language learning, multimodality, and multi-semiosis.

For this educational focus, Martin’s definition of genre as a staged goal-oriented social process, along with his explication of that staged nature in terms of linguistically identifiable obligatory and optional “moves”, has become iconic in the SFL pedagogically oriented genre literature. Regarding the details of curriculum sequencing, Martin’s schematic presentation, discussion, and exemplification of a sequenced typology of secondary school history genres is likely to be particularly helpful for faculty contemplating curriculum development. One might call it a kind of academic needs analysis. In any case, for the literature faculty constructing the GUGD curriculum Martin’s emphasis on genre seemed both comfortably familiar and enticingly novel. Moreover, a curricular progression based on history genres was educationally persuasive: after all, similar to other programs, we too want to enable students to know about and interpret aspects of life in German cultural contexts across time while they are learning the language. Especially in the early stages of our curriculum reform, treatments like Martin’s offered intellectual excitement, energy, and a sense of empowerment: this made sense, and collectively we could do this! (See e.g., Byrnes, 2001, 2002; Byrnes & Kord, 2002, Byrnes et al., 2002, 2006).

(5) Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 5(2), 93–116.

My next choice, an article by Halliday, the founder of SFL, further expands the notion of language-based meaning-making. But it adds two important dimensions: the argument that educational

learning is massively dependent on verbal learning and that it follows identifiable meaning-focused developmental stages. It is this latter characteristic that justifies this article's presence on my bookshelf.

In overview fashion, Halliday proposes 21 stages with the through-line that 'meaning is at once both doing and understanding' and that meaning-making gradually becomes more elaborated and functionally differentiated. The initially dominant interpersonal and experiential functions evolve into the full functionality of adult language use expressed along three dimensions: the interpersonal and foundational function because symbols are used right from the beginning of life in any human interaction; the ideational function, whereby experiential meaning-making is enhanced by organizing experience along different logical-semantic lines, such as temporal relationships and cause and effect; and the textual function, where language construes parallel worlds of semiosis, what Halliday calls a 'virtual world' beyond the purely experiential world. All three functions are simultaneously present in any language use.

Perhaps readers unfamiliar with SFL will experience a kind of aha-moment as they consider Halliday's theorization of the notoriously difficult shift from serviceable conversational, intermediate-level L2 performance toward public-academic language use. Halliday's analysis characterizes it as a profound resemioticization of experience in metaphorical terms, referring to these two forms that are concurrently available to linguistic adults as dynamic and synoptic, sometimes also congruent and incongruent modes of meaning-making. That distinction has been widely adopted for understanding more oral as compared with more written forms of language use (Halliday, 2002). Its most outstanding lexicogrammatical resource is grammatical metaphor (GM), a conceptual and terminological landmark with seemingly limitless implications across all levels of language use.

It would be utter folly to summarize in a few words a highly elaborated theory of language like SFL that, over roughly 60 years, has been laid out in a vast number of publications. Instead, I have chosen four additional bookshelf entries that elaborate on how SFL-inspired ways of THINKING about language-based learning can provide an expansive and solid foundation for CREATING a curriculum, inherently a longitudinal educational construct, for a particular setting.

(6) Hasan, R., & with Perrett, G. (1994, 2011). Learning to function with the other tongue: A systemic functional perspective on second language teaching [1994]. In J. H. Webster (Ed.), *Language and education: Learning and teaching in society. The collected works of Ruqaiya Hasan* (Vol. 3, pp. 288–335). Equinox.

I have chosen this more narrative-discursive treatment of key SFL theoretical concepts and terminology in order to signal that developing a curriculum is not a bureaucratic-administrative document dump; rather, it encapsulates an entire belief system regarding language teaching and learning. A faculty group creating a curriculum is really creating a new narrative for its educational commitments and praxes. I consider Hasan's treatment a good way to develop the new plotline for a language-based meaning-oriented curriculum, along with the vocabulary for telling its overarching story.

The core concern for Hasan is the social basis of language from which she draws the metafunctional quality of language that animates SFL. Those "metafunctions" are abstract properties of language for the purpose of analyzing the social situations in which language use is embedded; they should not be confused with social use itself nor functional-notional pragmatic functionalism as espoused by Wilkins. The relationship between social context and the parameters of social relations between its participants is referred to as TENOR; the nature of the social action itself is its FIELD; and the management of the social event is addressed as its MODE—we have previously encountered them as the interpersonal, ideational, and textual metafunctions.

Hasan affirms the central tenet of SFL, its intrinsic metafunctionally; but now it is discussed in terms of the very design of language as a stratified system: semantics, the system of meaning; lexicogrammar, the system of wording; and phonology, the system of sound. A central quality of language use—including language use in learning a second language—is therefore system-oriented choice in order to make meaning in context.

To me, Hasan's article highlights the fact that a curricular framework is not a stand-alone artifact. Rather, for it to be usable, educators must be able to organically interweave a curricular with a pedagogical story-line. Teaching and learning, especially within a well-considered curriculum, will be about enabling learners to make choices in well circumscribed instances of communication, an approach that fundamentally differs from the much-touted "learner-centered pedagogies". Different as well is a teacher's approach to teaching of "grammar", including the prohibition to teach it "explicitly": grammar teaching in SFL is raising awareness about SYSTEM-DERIVED CHOICE IN CONTEXT, and learning to use a language is to learn HOW to mean with the lexicogrammatical resources that the language system offers as WAYS OF MEANING.

Hasan helpfully contrasts such a stance with the position taken in TBLT with its over-emphasis on the active engagement and largely unguided creativity of the learner, the privileging of task completion, and, correlatively, the marginalization of the meaning-making resources of the language itself that learners need for reaching their communicative goals.

(7) Ryshina-Pankova, M. (2018). Systemic functional linguistics and advanced second language proficiency. In P. Malovrh & A. Benati (Eds.), *The handbook of advanced proficiency in second language acquisition* (pp. 9–29). Routledge.

I have always been fascinated by how adults learn an additional language to very high performance levels, particularly if they do so at the college level, in the limited time span of programs, and with little previous exposure to the language. Perhaps that is what is behind my otherwise esoteric interest in curriculum. Professional folklore holds that such levels of attainment require unusual "language aptitude". My reading of the literature and my own experience with many a learner who did accomplish that feat not only was skeptical of its restricted take on "aptitude", I saw as even more troubling the near-absence of substantive professional discussion on L2 advancedness: we are remarkably bereft theoretically, empirically, and with regard to suitable educational praxes. To this day, I consider SFL as offering the most principled approach to fostering advanced levels of instructed FL performance, a bias that motivates inclusion of Marianna Ryshina-Pankova's article.

Drawing on Halliday's seminal insights, she explores how advancedness can be understood particularly well in terms of synoptic forms of meaning-making, and how this capacity is most pervasively realized through GM: SFL theorizes and is able to document advancedness empirically as an expansion of semiotic resources that the language system itself makes available. This is possible when the typical correspondence between grammatical form and language function, such as verbs expressing processes or modality being expressed through modal verbs is upended. Instead, reality is being expressed metaphorically through a range of other grammatical means, but most especially through nominalization. In fact, one might say that the role played by GM crystallizes the difference between the dynamic mode of the commonsense grammar used to describe daily life in its processes and flows and the more synoptic mode of written grammar with its preference for structure and stasis. Halliday calls the latter a preference for "the thinginess of the world", with all the conceptual and disciplinary consequences of that shift.

Ryshina-Pankova not only offers a useful overview regarding advancedness in all three metafunctional areas—the ideational, the interpersonal, and, most importantly, the textual—but she also amply illustrates each of them and explores their astounding implications for new ways of meaning-making. Her concluding focus on how these advanced lexicogrammatical resources tend to develop in instructed settings, how they might be fostered through carefully choreographed teacher–learner interaction with tasks, and how they might be assessed deepens our understanding of curricular work. We are not concerned with a clever educational device; we are concerned with a much-needed expansion of disciplinary horizons. With its holistic stance, the article affirms the intricate connection between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as a way of supporting advanced levels of FL learning; and it affirms and substantiates the intellectual heft of language teaching and learning in higher education.

(8) Schleppegrell, M. J. (2001). Linguistic features of the language of schooling. *Linguistics and Education*, 12(4), 431–459.

Viewed more generally, dynamic and synoptic modes of language use are at the heart of schooling and educational knowledge. By invoking them for curriculum creation we not only acknowledge the intricate interrelationship between language use and knowledge acquisition, knowledge creation, and knowledge transmission, but we can also begin to address what constitutes a curriculum's "content", a central issue for collegiate FL programs.

Once again linking curriculum and pedagogy, Mary Schleppegrell's article lays out how successful learning in school settings requires high levels of awareness, on the part of teachers and students, regarding the nature and most suitable deployments of particular lexicogrammatical features. Her overarching claim is that a key function of the language of schooling is the authoritative presentation of information. That requires subject-specific, often technical language and a rich repertoire of resources for expressing logical and cause and effect relationships for structuring information.

Two characteristics distinguish the article. The first is her treatment of both oral language use, which tends to require joint construction, and written, textual language use, with its distancing qualities, where the absent communicative partner is nevertheless expressed in particular forms of language use. Such an approach recognizes that collegiate FL instruction, no matter a tendency to privilege literate language use, is keenly interested in both. In fact, one of the most heartening insights in the GUGD project has been the extraordinarily facilitative contributions to adult language learning in all modes—and that, of course, includes speaking, of a literacy-oriented curriculum (e.g., Norris & Pfeiffer, 2003).

And the second point is this: while Schleppegrell extends such consideration down to the sentence, clause, and phrase level, a move that appears to tilt toward pedagogy, that pedagogy is motivated by and embedded in long-term and dynamic curricular thinking. Among its many insights are that "complexity" is a much more relational, much more multi-faceted, much more extended, and, most importantly, much more meaning-driven phenomenon than the preferred psycholinguistically-oriented treatment would have us believe. Educators deserve to receive such research-derived validation of their own experience-based intuitions.

(9) Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2009). Meaning in the making: Meaning potential emerging from acts of meaning. *Language Learning*, 59(Suppl. 1), 206–229.

Throughout these reflections, I have highlighted the intellectual nature of curriculum construction, as contrasted with a mostly instrumental interpretation. Because I have advocated a less familiar theoretical framework, SFL, some of the selections may have been challenging.

The last SFL-inspired entry of my bookshelf, an article by Christian Matthiessen, a long-time collaborator with Halliday, may well evoke such a response. But who said that the most important quality of language analysis, much less educational decision-making, is binary parsimoniousness to the point of egregious distortion of the phenomenon at hand?

Matthiessen characterizes language as a higher order semiotic system, that is, as a system that both carries meaning and creates meaning. I quote him directly:

Like other kinds of system, language is both system and instance. These are not separate phenomena, but rather different phases of a unified phenomenon extended along a *cline of instantiation* from potential to instance. Because the central characteristic of language is that it is a resource for making meaning, we can say that the *acts of meaning* that make up a text unfolding in time instantiate a *meaning potential*, noting that these are simply different phases of language as a meaning-making resource: acts instantiate potential, and potential emerges from acts. This is where we can locate *learning*: Learning takes place when instances are distilled into potential higher up along the cline of instantiation. (p. 207, original italic)

As posited and described, the cline of instantiation is a continuum that is marked by intermediate patterns of meaning, such as registers as functional types or text types/genres that operate in different

situation types. We know them to be functionally specified in terms of TENOR, FIELD, and MODE. Looking at genre from the system side and its full potential for meaning-making, they are constrained forms of use. Looked at from the other side of the pole, the instance side, they are texts that belong to distinctive text types with their recurrent patterns. Either way, as constraints or as pattern-infused instances, they are realizations of a system's full meaning potential. Moreover, what from the perspective of the full system looks like a constraint is clearly beneficial for learning to mean because it focuses on a particular registerial or genre potential. Its instantiation allows an individual learner to build up a personal meaning potential in ways that yet reflect the collective meaning potential of the system.

Admittedly, such arguments may be novel. Even so, educators should be heartened by Matthiessen's observation that they take note of the fact that language, in all its complexity, is nevertheless a learnable system. It is learnable in as much as we do not encounter it all at once, and, indeed, do not need to, as long as individual encounters are flooded with its systemic quality as well as its variability in a kind of semiotic boundedness. That condition defines native language learning. But it can also apply to FL language learning when it is guided by a curriculum that is carefully conceptualized along the cline of instantiation of register/genre sub-potentials: instructed learning that is embedded in such a curriculum can be responsive to and tap into the learning potential of a system- and textual meaning-oriented approach.

(10) Byrnes, H., Maxim, H. H., & Norris, J. M. (2010). Realizing advanced foreign language writing development in collegiate education: Curricular design, pedagogy, assessment. *Modern Language Journal*, 94(Suppl. 1), (pp. iv–vi, 1–235).

My next entry reflects the fact that the GUGD curriculum project has, for more than 25 years, been at the center of my professional and personal life. It has been scholarly stimulus, intellectual excitement, context for collaborative action, site for satisfaction, academic-administrative challenge, and never-ending source for insights and open questions. Fortunately, the faculty and graduate student groups that originally created it and over two and a half decades have continued to shape and renew it have responded similarly. Two people in particular, John Norris, co-author for this selection, and Lourdes Ortega, have profoundly influenced that response; my deepest thanks go to these two extraordinary scholars and personal friends and to all my colleagues.

While I have listed the full monograph that details the genesis, design, and implementation of the department's curricular reform, the chosen readings are limited to Chapter 3, "Modeling development toward advanced foreign language writing abilities: A genre-based approach", and Chapter 4, "Implementing a genre-based program of foreign language writing development." Once again, the monograph foregrounds writing development because it is a particularly instructive and persuasive environment as well as a particularly transparent way of addressing issues of pedagogy and assessment that arise in an all-modality, comprehensive curriculum renewal with an educational goal of academic multiple literacies.

So, here is my invitation: "Take up and read!"

Considering further implications

The two remaining entries on my bookshelf consider possible future developments: I have been intrigued by the possibility that program evaluation, often used for ascertaining instructional effectiveness, and dynamic systems theory, two seemingly distant areas of inquiry, might further inform curricular thinking and that curricular thinking might, in turn, contribute valuable insights to them.

(11) Norris, J. M. (2015). Thinking and acting programmatically in task-based language teaching. In M. Bygate (Ed.), *Domains and directions in the development of TBLT: A decade of plenaries from the international conference* (pp. 27–57). John Benjamins.

In this article, we return once more to the construct of "task" with yet another critical look. First, Norris affirms its fundamentally education-oriented nature rooted in the educational philosophy of

pragmatists like John Dewey and encapsulated in its orientation toward entire educational programs. Second, he is concerned that TBLT inquiry has drifted toward privileging its own theoretical positions and epistemological-methodological preferences over illuminating educational practice. Third, he suggests program evaluation as an encompassing, education-oriented way to redirect TBLT research.

In the original 2005 plenary, he proposed two paths. First, we must find “useful ways of gathering information that can inform the understanding, development, delivery, and improvement of language educational programs in actual settings”; and, second, we need

... systematic accounts of TBLT being put into educational practice To understand (a) which task-based ideas are being used ... (b) how decisions about design and implementation of task-based learning experiences are actually made, and (c) what factors and actors conspire to determine the lived realities of task-based language classrooms. (pp. 53–54)

At this point of our curriculum-focused journey, I suggest expanding Norris’s recommendations along two axes. Along the first axis, I have already argued for repositioning task within a genre-based curricular progression (for extended discussion, see Byrnes, 2015). Regarding the second axis, educational embeddedness, I reiterate the need for conceptualizing language education in terms of “curriculum” instead of “syllabus”. It is the longitudinally more expansive and therefore more desirable educational horizon; done right, it is also the more teacher-designed, more theoretically grounded, and more consciously delivered educational environment, and for that reason much more robust than “program” as proposed by Norris.

Taken together, both perspectives strongly argue for curricular thinking as the educational, pragmatic, and scholarly reference point needed for creating systematic accounts of what happens in language teaching and learning. To be sure, different educational settings will result in different curricular solutions. But complex systems oriented sociological research (e.g., Byrne, 2013; Byrne & Callaghan, 2014; Cilliers & Preiser, 2010; Osberg & Biesta, 2010) offers methodologies that do not result in unacceptable “apples and oranges” comparisons but do overcome the constricted notions of control that applied linguistics research has for too long used as the sole guarantor of scientific rigor. To improve learning outcomes, at minimum we need to firmly embrace the reality that most effects are complexly interactive and that findings are oftentimes limited to certain social-cultural places, settings, and times (see Cronbach, 1975).

(12) Byrnes, H. (2020). Envisioning L2 writing development in CDST under a curricular optic: A proposal. In G. G. Fogal & M. H. Verspoor (Eds.), *Complex dynamic systems: Theory and L2 writing development* (pp. 241–270). John Benjamins.

Such considerations are a segue into my final selection. It links curriculum to complexity theory or, more fully, complex dynamic systems theory (CDST). Set in motion by Diane Larsen-Freeman close to three decades ago, she has immeasurably influenced how applied linguists might more suitably think of language teaching and learning and, most especially, how we might reimagine multilingual language learners themselves. My own indebtedness to her will be obvious. It is all the greater as I have yet to work through the many impulses she offers in light of my own beliefs and experiences as a researcher, teacher, and learner of other languages, here seen from the perspective of curriculum. The following comments reflect that happily unfinished exploration and continued openness.

Just like the earlier description of the GUGD curriculum project, this article, too, uses a focus on writing as a useful heuristic for exploring long-term development across all modalities that is at the heart of academically oriented educational work. It adopts CDST thinking as foundational if we are to understand multilingual language learning, including instructed language learning. That sets up this challenge: is it possible to take the commonly held view of curriculum as a linear progression along a timeline and re-position, re-theorize, and re-practice it within the complex systemic qualities of teaching and learning in educational settings? Their systemic qualities are at once variational in

particular instances of communication by particular learners and yet directional toward the desired educational goals as educators have envisioned them in their curriculum.

To me, the answer has been a resounding “yes” when we explicitly consider the construct “curriculum” within a system environment, that is, as a subsystem within the larger complex system of an educational setting. That same conceptual move would also offer the possibility of endowing the vague notion of “context” with operationalizable qualities and, ultimately, with transparency for all stakeholders. Such a reorientation of “curriculum” is possible only with a fundamental reorientation of what “language” is and, therefore, what instructed language learning and development are—long-term, dynamic, and probabilistic choices by multilingual learners in particular instances of communication that educators have chosen carefully for their potential to expand learners’ meaning-making abilities in relation to the resources made available by the language system. In this way, curricula would move from the margins of disciplinary thinking to becoming indispensable proposals for understanding instructed language learning: from a theoretical standpoint, from the research side, and from the standpoint of educational practice.

As readers complete the entries in my essential bookshelf regarding curriculum, I invite them to consider how traversing its selections might re-sign some of the most important directional markers for instructed language learning. They now point toward selection and sequencing of instructional events under a systemic horizon; learning and development with and within a probabilistic meaning-oriented grammar; creation of a curricular framework in order to foster meaning-oriented learner agency; and longitudinal-ness as supporting the evolving and non-finite semiotic capacities of instructed multilingual learners.

References

- Baralt, M., Gilabert, R., & Robinson, P. (2014). An introduction to theory and research in task sequencing and instructed second language learning. In M. Baralt, R. Gilabert, & P. Robinson (Eds.), *Task sequencing and instructed second language learning* (pp. 1–34). Bloomsbury.
- Byrne, D. (2013). Evaluating complex social interventions in a complex world. *Evaluation*, 19(3), 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389013495617>.
- Byrne, D., & Callaghan, G. (2014). *Complexity theory and the social sciences. The state of the art*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- Byrnes, H. (2001). Reconsidering graduate students’ education as teachers: “it takes a department!”. *Modern Language Journal*, 85(4), 512–530. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1193073>.
- Byrnes, H. (2002). The role of task and task-based assessment in a content-oriented collegiate FL curriculum. *Language Testing*, 19(4), 419–437.
- Byrnes, H. (2008). Perspectives: Transforming college and university foreign language departments: A proposal. *Modern Language Journal*, 92(2), 284–312. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25173028>.
- Byrnes, H. (2015). Linking ‘task’ and curricular thinking: An affirmation of the TBLT educational agenda. In M. Bygate (Ed.), *Domains and directions in the development of TBLT: A decade of plenaries from the international conference* (pp. 193–224). John Benjamins.
- Byrnes, H. (2020). Envisioning L2 writing development in CDST under a curricular optic: A proposal. In G. G. Fogal, & M. H. Verspoor (Eds.), *Complex dynamic systems theory and L2 writing development* (pp. 241–270). John Benjamins.
- Byrnes, H., Crane, C., Maxim, H. H., & Sprang, K. A. (2006). Taking text to task: Issues and choices in curriculum construction. *ITL: International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 152, 85–110.
- Byrnes, H., Crane, C., & Sprang, K. A. (2002). Non-native teachers teaching at the advanced level: Challenges and opportunities. *ADFL Bulletin*, 33(3), 25–34.
- Byrnes, H., & Kord, S. (2002). Developing literacy and literary competence: Challenges for foreign language departments. In V. M. Scott, & H. Tucker (Eds.), *SLA and the literature classroom: Fostering dialogues* (pp. 35–73). Heinle & Heinle.
- Byrnes, H., Maxim, H. H., & Norris, J. M. (2010). Realizing advanced foreign language writing development in collegiate education: Curricular design, pedagogy, assessment. *Modern Language Journal*, 94(Supplement s-1), iv–vi. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40985261>.
- Cilliers, P., & Preiser, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Complexity, difference and identity: An ethical perspective*. Springer.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1975). Beyond the two disciplines of scientific psychology. *American Psychologist*, 30, 116–127.
- Flowerdew, J. (2002). Genre in the classroom: A linguistic approach. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom* (pp. 91–102). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 5(2), 93–116.

- Halliday, M. A. K. (2002). Spoken and written modes of meaning. In J. J. Webster (Ed.), *The collected works of M. A. K. Halliday. On grammar* (Vol. 1, pp. 323–351). Continuum.
- Hasan, R., with Perrett, G. (1994, 2011). Learning to function with the other tongue: A systemic functional perspective on second language teaching [1994]. In J. H. Webster (Ed.), *The collected works of Ruqaiya Hasan. Language and education: Learning and teaching in society* (Vol. 3, pp. 288–335). Equinox.
- Long, M. H., & Crookes, G. (1993). Units of analysis in syllabus design: The case for task. In G. Crookes, & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Tasks in a pedagogical context: Integrating theory and practice* (pp. 9–54). Multilingual Matters.
- Martin, J. R. (1991). Intrinsic functionality: Implications for contextual theory. *Social Semiotics*, 1(1), 99–162. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898\(93\)90026-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(93)90026-7).
- Martin, J. R. (2009). Genre and language learning: A social semiotic perspective. *Linguistics and Education*, 20(1), 10–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2009.01.003htt>.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2009). Meaning in the making: Meaning potential emerging from acts of meaning. *Language Learning*, 59(Suppl.1), 206–229.
- MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. (2007). Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world. *Profession*, '2007, 234–245. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25595871>.
- Norris, J. M. (2015). Thinking and acting programmatically in task-based language teaching. In M. Bygate (Ed.), *Domains and directions in the development of TBLT: A decade of plenaries from the international conference* (pp. 27–57). John Benjamins.
- Norris, J. M., & Pfeiffer, P. C. (2003). Exploring the uses and usefulness of ACTFL oral proficiency ratings and standards in college foreign language departments. *Foreign Language Annals*, 36(4), 572–581. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2002.tb02147.x>.
- Osberg, D., & Biesta, G. (Eds.). (2010). *Complexity theory and the politics of education*. Sense Publishers.
- Ryshina-Pankova, M. (2018). Systemic functional linguistics and advanced second language proficiency. In P. Malovrh & A. Benati (Eds.), *The handbook of advanced proficiency in second language acquisition* (pp. 9–29). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Schleppegrell, M. J. (2001). Linguistic features of the language of schooling. *Linguistics and Education*, 12(4), 431–459.