3 *Learner-Centred Curriculum Development*

3.1 Introduction

One way of typifying curriculum models is in the degree to which they allow curriculum development to occur at the local level. A fully centralised curriculum, as the name suggests, is one which is devised in a centralised location and then disseminated (this is sometimes known as the centre-periphery model for obvious reasons). Many school curricula developed during the 1950s and 1960s accorded with this centralised model. They were often produced by a government department or agency, and then disseminated to a wide range of learning institutions. The responsibility of the teacher in such systems was often little more than to implement the curriculum and to act as 'classroom manager'. An example of a centralised approach to language teaching is the *Situational English* course which was developed for teaching ESL in Australia during the 1960s and early 1970s. During this time, it was possible to go into language classrooms all over the country and find a similar curriculum in place for teaching a wide range of learners. In those days the only criteria for differentiating learners was level of proficiency.

During the 1960s, the relative inflexibility of centralised curricula, and a change in educational thinking which paid more attention to the learner, led to the 'school-based' curriculum development movement. School-based curricula are devised either wholly or in part within the teaching institution itself. Such curricula are capable of being much more responsive than centralised curricula to the needs and interests of the learners they serve. The learner-centred movement in ESL/EFL is partly an offspring of the school-based curriculum movement.

A perennial tension in language teaching is between those who subscribe to a subject-centred view and those who subscribe to a learner-centred view of language and language learning. The subject-centred view sees learning a language as essentially the mastering of a body of knowledge. The learner-centred view, on the other hand, tends to view language acquisition as a process of acquiring skills rather than a body of knowledge. Both viewpoints are quite valid, and most courses will reflect elements of both. It is the relative emphasis given to language as a body of content to be internalised, or language as communicative processes to be developed, which will determine which of the labels

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'subject-centred' or 'learner-centred' should apply to a given curriculum proposal.

Proponents of learner-centred curricula are less interested in learners acquiring the totality of the language than in assisting them gain the communicative and linguistic skills they need to carry out real-world tasks. Implicit in this learner-centred view is a recognition that no one person (not even a native speaker) ever masters every aspect of the language. If it were possible to master every aspect of every skill in a given language, and if one had unlimited time to teach or learn another language, then there would be no need to make choices, and consequently no debate. However, given the fact that most learners do not have unlimited time (many may have only between 150–300 hours of formal instruction) it is crucial that appropriate choices be made.

3.2 Theoretical Bases for Learner-Centred Curricula

In this section the theoretical background to the development of learner-centred language teaching is explored. We shall take a brief look at the theory and practice of adult learning before looking at the development of communicative language learning and teaching. The proficiency movement is also described. Finally we shall look at the implications of the learner-centred philosophy for the language teacher. This provides the context for an examination of the nature of the curriculum, and the various elements within a curriculum model which come into prominence when the curriculum is seen from a learner-centred perspective.

The theory and practice of adult learning or androgogy has had a long history. However, it is only comparatively recently that this theory and practice has been related to adult language learning. The most prominent theorist in the field of adult learning is Knowles (1983), whose book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* became very influential in adult learning circles.

Two other specialists in adult learning theory whose work has been influential in language teaching circles are Brundage and MacKeracher (1980). Their book *Adult Learning Principles and Their Application to Programme Planning* is regularly cited these days in the language teaching literature. Some of the principles of adult learning identified by Brundage and MacKeracher are as follows:

> Adults who value their own experience as a resource for further learning or whose experience is valued by others are better learners.
>
> Adults learn best when they are involved in developing learning objectives for themselves which are congruent with their current and idealised self concept.
>
> Adults have already developed organised ways of focusing on, taking

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in and processing information. These are referred to as cognitive style.
The learner reacts to all experience as he perceives it, not as the teacher presents it.
Adults enter into learning activities with an organised set of descriptions and feelings about themselves which influence the learning process.
Adults are more concerned with whether they are changing in the direction of their own idealised self-concept than whether they are meeting standards and objectives set for them by others.
Adults do not learn when over-stimulated or when experiencing extreme stress or anxiety.
Those adults who can process information through multiple channels and have learnt 'how to learn' are the most productive learners.
Adults learn best when the content is personally relevant to past experience or present concerns and the learning process is relevant to life experiences.
Adults learn best when novel information is presented through a variety of sensory modes and experiences, with sufficient repetitions and variations on themes to allow distinctions in patterns to emerge.

(Brundage and MacKeracher 1980:21–31)

The research surveyed by Brundage and MacKeracher in formulating their principles of adult learning indicate that adult learners are profoundly influenced by past learning experiences, present concerns and future prospects. They are less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning to achieve some immediate or not too far distant life goals. Translated to the field of language teaching, this suggests that a learner-centred rather than subject-centred approach is more likely to be consonant with the principles of adult learning. Adult learners are less likely to be interested in subscribing to the 'banking principle', that is in gaining mastery over subject matter or skills which may be useful at some far distant date, than in acquiring skills which can be put to immediate use. However, the empirical evidence on this matter is rather thin. What evidence we do have seems to suggest that adult learners vary markedly in their attitudes towards learning, their preferred learning styles and their perceptions of what is of value and what is not (Willing 1985).

In his study of adult language learners, Brindley suggests that:

> . . . one of the fundamental principles underlying the notion of permanent education is that education should develop in individuals the capacity to control their own destiny and that, therefore, the learner should be seen as being at the centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher, this means that instructional programmes should be centred around learners' needs and that learners themselves should exercise their own

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> responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods as well as in determining the means used to assess their performance.
>
> (Brindley 1984:15)

From his survey of the literature, Brindley concludes that adult learners are not merely passive recipients of subject matter devised by some educational authority, but have 'a wide experience of life which can be brought to bear in the learning process'. It is this belief among others which leads him to adopt a learner- rather than a subject-centred approach to the development of language curricula.

An important figure on the curriculum landscape is Munby (1978). The Munby model, which was at first thought to hold great promise for language syllabus design, has come increasingly under criticism in the last few years and is now generally regarded as the core document in the narrow-band approach to needs-based course design. This narrow-band approach sees course design largely in terms of the specification of the 'what' of language teaching to the exclusion of the 'how'. The somewhat mechanical nature of the procedures for deriving course input and the atomistic approach to language specification and learning has been criticised as well. In fact, in some ways the Munby model can be seen to be antithetical to the learner-centred philosophy from which it was supposedly derived. Being based on data about the learner, rather than incorporating data from the learner, it could be argued that the model is only superficially learner-centred.

While the Munby model might be quite adequate for providing objective information for content specification, it fails to provide the sort of subjective information which is at the heart of the learner-centred procedures for curriculum design. The distinction between subjective and objective needs analysis, and procedures for using both types of analysis in designing language curricula are considered in greater detail in Chapter 4.

3.3 Communicative Language Teaching and Learner-Centred Curricula

A major impetus to the develop of learner-centred language teaching came with the advent of communicative language teaching. In fact, this is more a cluster of approaches than a single methodology, which grew out of the dissatisfaction with structuralism and the situational methods of the 1960s. Its status was enhanced by the Council of Europe, and some seminal documents on communicative language teaching have in fact stemmed from this body. Prominent among these are *Threshold*

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Level English by van Ek and Alexander (1980), and *Notional Syllabuses* by Wilkins (1976).

A great deal has been written in the last few years about the theory and practice of communicative language teaching. However, a basic principle underlying all communicative approaches is that learners must learn not only to make grammatically correct, propositional statements about the experiential world, but must also develop the ability to use language to get things done. These two aspects of language are captured in the distinction between the propositional and illocutionary (or functional) levels of language (Widdowson 1978). It was recognised that simply being able to create grammatically correct structures in language did not necessarily enable the learner to use the language to carry out various real-world tasks. While the learners have to be able to construct grammatically correct structures (or reasonable approximations of target language structures), they also have to do much more. In working out what this 'much more' entails, linguists and sociolinguists began to explore the concept of the speech situation. In so doing they were able to articulate some of the ways in which language is likely be influenced by situational variables. Among the more important of these variables are the situation itself, the topic of conversation, the conversational purpose, and, probably the most important of all, the relationship between interlocutors in an interaction. All of these interact in complex ways in communicative interaction.

As already indicated, early support for communicative language teaching came from the Council of Europe. Basically, the Council of Europe wanted to specify the sorts of things that language users might want to do with languages used within the European Community. Consequently, they were thinking of a specified group of adult learners using the languages of Europe to carry out specified tasks which included not only economic and business activities, but also recreational and tourist activities. It is important to be aware of this historical background because communicative approaches are currently used in many different contexts and situations, not all of which were intended by the original working party of the Council of Europe, and in consequence some Council of Europe perspectives may not be relevant.

According to Howatt, there is a strong and a weak version of communicative language teaching. He says:

> The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language teaching.
>
> (Howatt 1984:279)

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The strong version of communicative language teaching, however, sees language ability as being developed through activities which actually simulate target performance. In other words, class time should be spent not on language drills or controlled practice leading towards communicative language use, but in activities which require learners to do in class what they will have to do outside.

In recent years it is the weak version which seems to have gained sway. Thus, we see teachers who adhere to a communicative view of language teaching also incorporating elements of structural practice and grammar teaching into their classes. Littlewood is a proponent of the weak view of communicative language teaching. He says:

> The structural view of language has not been in any way superseded by the functional view. However, it is not sufficient on its own to account for how language is used as a means of communication. Let us take as an example a straightforward sentence such as 'Why don't you close the door?' From a structural viewpoint, it is unambiguously an interrogative. Different grammars may describe it in different ways, but none could argue that its grammatical form is that of a declarative or imperative. From a functional viewpoint, however, it is ambiguous. In different circumstances it may appear to function as a question – for example, the speaker may genuinely wish to know why his companion never closes a certain door. In others, it may function as a command . . .
>
> (Littlewood 1981:1)

In fact this weak version has so successfully synthesised traditional and 'communicative' principles that it is debatable whether the term 'communicative' is still useful. (Few teachers these days would admit to teaching 'non-communicatively'.)

In a useful survey of communicative language teaching, Quinn suggests that communicative approaches can be distinguished from traditional approaches to language pedagogy in a number of ways. These are set out in Table 3.1:

TABLE 3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

Traditional approaches	*Communicative approaches*
1 *Focus in learning*:	
Focus is on the language as a structured system of grammatical patterns.	Focus is on communication.

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Traditional approaches	*Communicative approaches*
2 *How language items are selected*:	
This is done on linguistic criteria alone.	This is done on the basis of what language items the learner needs to know in order to get things done.
3 *How language items are sequenced*:	
This is determined on linguistic grounds.	This is determined on other grounds, with the emphasis on content, meaning and interest.
4 *Degree of coverage*:	
The aim is to cover the 'whole picture' of language structure by systematic linear progression.	The aim is to cover, in any particular phase, only what the learner needs and sees as important.
5 *View of language*:	
A language is seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words.	The variety of language is accepted, and seen as determined by the character of particular communicative contexts.
6 *Type of language used*:	
Tends to be formal and bookish.	Genuine everyday language is emphasised.
7 *What is regarded as a criterion of success*:	
Aim is to have students produce formally correct sentences.	Aim is to have students communicate effectively and in a manner appropriate to the context they are working in.
8 *Which language skills are emphasised*:	
Reading and writing.	Spoken interactions are regarded as at least as important as reading and writing.

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Traditional approaches	*Communicative approaches*
9 *Teacher/Student roles*:	
Tends to be teacher-centred.	Is student-centred.
10 *Attitude to errors*:	
Incorrect utterances are seen as deviations from the norms of standard grammar.	Partially correct and incomplete utterances are seen as such rather than just 'wrong'.
11 *Similarity/dissimilarity to natural language learning*:	
Reverses the natural language learning process by concentrating on the form of utterances rather than on the content.	Resembles the natural language learning process in that the content of the utterance is emphasised rather than the form.

(*Adapted from:* Quinn 1984:61–64)

3.4 Communicative Language Teaching – The Teacher's Perspective

In this section, a study is reported which investigated the attitudes of teachers towards communicative language teaching. The point of departure for the study was an earlier investigation into the methodological practices of foreign language teachers by Swaffar, Arens and Morgan (1982).

Background

The study undertaken by Swaffar, Arens and Morgan was designed to test the salience for foreign language teachers of the distinction between rationalist and empiricist approaches to language learning. Results indicated that the methodological debate which had assumed great prominence during the 1960s and 1970s and which resulted in a number of large-scale though inconclusive studies may have been based on false assumptions about the salience of different methodological practices for classroom teachers. Swaffar *et al.* concluded from their investigation that:

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> Methodological labels assigned to teaching activities are, in themselves, not informative, because they refer to a pool of classroom practices which are universally used.
>
> (Swaffar, Arens and Morgan 1982:31)

Given the prominence of communicative language teaching in the literature, a study was designed to investigate the salience of 'communicative' as opposed to 'traditional' practices for second language teachers.

The Study

Following Quinn (1984) a survey instrument was constructed which consisted of statements typifying either 'traditional' or 'communicative' practices. There were also two buffer questions. Teachers were asked to rate each statement according to a five point scale. (This was adapted from the Swaffar *et al.* (1982) study.) The instrument is reproduced below.

Subjects for the study were 60 full-time and part-time teachers with the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP). As we shall be looking at several studies of AMEP teachers in this work, it might be as well to make a short digression to describe the context in which the teachers work.

The AMEP is one of the largest single-language programmes in the world, with annual enrolments in excess of 120,000, and over 1,500 teachers. Learning arrangements and course types vary greatly, from full-time intensive to part-time courses. Programme delivery occurs through face-to-face teaching, self-access and individualised learning centres, a distance education programme and a home tutor scheme. The AMEP receives its funding and policy direction from the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, while the administration and delivery of courses is managed by eight State and Territory educational bodies.

While all those taking part in the survey described below were concerned with the teaching of English to adult immigrants, they came from all parts of the Program and had a wide range of experience. The teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire in Table 3.2 during the course of an in-service workshop. The workshop was not concerned with communicative methodology, so the subjects were not 'primed' to respond to the items on the questionnaire in a particular way.

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TABLE 3.2 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ON 'TRADITIONAL' AND 'COMMUNICATIVE' ACTIVITIES

Instructions:

Please rate each of the statements according to the following key:

1 Virtual non-use. This principle or activity forms little or no part of my teaching methodology.
2 Trivial incidental use. This principle or activity forms a limited part of what I do, but I tend to reject its use more than I favour its use. Somewhat disagree with use.
3 Neutral.
4 Important supplementary use. This principle forms an important supplementary part of my teaching. Somewhat agree with use.
5 Essential use. This is essential to what I do, and it forms an essential part of my practice. Use or agree with use.

1 Drills involving manipulation of formal aspects of the language system are used. ....

2 The development of fluency is more important than formal accuracy. ....

3 Activities focus on whole-task rather than part-skill practice. ....

4 Comprehension activities precede activities requiring production. ....

5 'Grammar' is explicitly taught. ....

6 Learner errors are corrected. ....

7 Activities are selected because they are interesting/enjoyable rather than because they relate to course objectives. ....

8 Activities are derived in consultation with the learner. ....

9 Activities are developed which require the learner to simulate, in class, behaviours needed to communicate outside class. ....

Comments:

....

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Results

Each item in the survey form was rated according to the mean score, and an appropriate designation given. Ratings and item type are indicated in Table 3.3:

TABLE 3.3 RATINGS FOR ITEMS ACCORDING TO MEAN SCORE

Item	*Type*	*Rating*
1	Traditional	Trivial, incidental use
2	Communicative	Essential use
3	Communicative	Important supplementary use
4	Communicative	Important supplementary use
5	Traditional	Trivial, incidental use
6	Traditional	Trivial, incidental use
7	Buffer	Trivial, incidental use
8	Buffer	Important supplementary use
9	Communicative	Essential use

Discussion

The results demonstrate quite clearly that, for the group of teachers surveyed, the concept of 'communicative language teaching' is salient, with the three non-communicative and one of the buffer statements being accorded 'trivial incidental use'. While these results might, on the surface, appear to conflict with that obtained by Swaffar *et al.*, it is important not to read too much into them. In the first place, the study was designed to determine only what teachers said they did. It should not be assumed that their actual classroom practice followed these principles. (While this comment might seem to imply dishonesty or lack of awareness on the part of teachers, there is evidence that teachers do not, in fact, always do what they say or think they do. This evidence, which has implications for teacher development, is presented in Chapter 9.)

Another point which needs to be made and which could call into question the results is the fact that many of the teachers who commented on the survey criticised the use of questionnaires for data-collection purposes. Most of them wanted to qualify their responses in some way. a significant number stated that the response they gave would depend upon, and could vary according to, the type of students they had. Disquiet at the use of questionnaires for data-collection purposes was also expressed in other studies reported here, including the major study which forms the basis of the final chapter. It seems that, in general, teachers are loathe to give unequivocal responses on matters relating to professional practice.

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The buffer statement which rated well (8) relates to the learner-centred view of involving learners in selecting activities.

In developing a learner-centred philosophy for the AMEP Ingram stated that:

> Rather than being an arbitrary academic exercise, the course followed should be responsive to the learner's needs emanating from his stage of language development and his personal interests and aspirations. Thence, it must capitalise on the learner's natural and acquired learning strategies and ensure, through community involvement, that any bridge between the learner and the Australian community is bridged and any sense of undesirable alienisation is reduced.
>
> (Ingram 1981:4)

More recently Brindley (1984) has built on the work of Ingram and others. After surveying the literature, he provides a blueprint and a framework for introducing learner-centred principles into adult ESL. The strength of Brindley's work is that it brings together theory and practice. This work is analysed in Chapter 4, and many of the practical suggestions incorporated into that chapter owe a considerable debt to Brindley.

3.5 The Concept of Language Proficiency

It is generally considered desirable for language curricula to contain explicit statements about the nature of language and language learning. While some assumptions about these concepts are inherent in any curriculum, they are not always explicitly stated. This lack of explication may well be due to a lack of certainty on the part of theoretical and applied linguists. There is certainly no widespread agreement within the profession about the nature of language and learning.

This confusion can be seen in relation to the concept of language proficiency. Not only is there confusion about concepts, linguists seem incapable of agreeing on terminology. From an inspection of the literature, one quickly comes to the conclusion that linguists are obsessed with conceptual universes in which creatures come in pairs. Thus, we have 'langue' and 'parole', 'competence' and 'performance', 'use' and 'usage', 'form' and 'meaning', 'context' and 'cotext', 'cohesion' and 'coherence'. It was Chomsky (1965) who gave prominence to the competence–performance distinction (although the theoretical distinction between the terms was not Chomsky's). For Chomsky, 'competence' refers to mastery of the principles governing language behaviour. 'Performance' refers to the manifestation of these internalised rules in actual language use. The terms have come to be used to refer to what a person

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knows about a language (competence) and what a person does (performance). More recently, the term 'communicative competence' has gained currency. This refers to knowledge of the rules of use and appropriacy and includes linguistic competence. While this might seem reasonably straightforward, there are a number of complicating factors. To begin with, there is nothing like universal agreement on what is meant by 'knowing'. Does 'knowing the rules of language' mean being able to recite them? If so, most native speakers must be classed as incompetent. According to Chomsky, however, native speakers are, by definition, competent.

Diller suggests:

> Linguists are sometimes hesitant to say that ordinary people 'know' the rules of their language, because linguists themselves have such a hard time trying to formulate these rules explicitly.
>
> (Diller 1978:26)

He points out that children can create phonological rules for nonsense words through a process of analogy, although they are unable to give a formulation for these rules. He goes on to ask:

> But if children are not able to formulate the rules of grammar which they use, in what sense can we say that they 'know' these rules? This is the question which has bothered linguists. The answer is that they know the rules in a functional way, in a way which relates the changes in abstract grammatical structure to changes in meaning. Knowledge does not always have to be formulated. Children can use tools before they learn the names for these tools.
>
> (*op cit.*:26–27)

For Diller then, knowledge need not be conscious but may manifest itself in the ability to use the language. However, this would seem to render the competence–performance distinction rather uncertain.

Krashen (1981, 1982) further confuses the issue by suggesting that knowledge of linguistic rules is the outward manifestation of one psychological construct (learning), while the manifestation of these rules in use is the manifestation of another construct (acquisition). Rea (1985) has since questioned the need for a 'competence' construct by suggesting that as we can observe only instances of performance, not competence, the competence–performance distinction is redundant. She brings this view into line with communicative language teaching by proposing yet another bifurcation; communicative performance and non-communicative performance.

It would seem, therefore, that we have reached a point where linguistic knowledge is to be defined in terms of what an individual is able to do with that knowledge. This is reinforced by a recent movement in ESL

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in the United States; competency-based ESL. As though there were not enough confusion over terminology, this movement is using 'competence' to refer to things learners can do with language; that is, it is used in roughly the same sense as 'performance' in the earlier competence–performance distinction. The concept of competency-based education (CBE) has been brought in to ESL from the field of adult education where it is used to specify the skills needed by adults to function in today's society in areas such as communication, computation, problem solving and interpersonal relationships.

In ESL, 'a competency is a task-oriented goal written in terms of behavioural objectives' (CAL 1983:9). The following characteristics of CBE as it relates to ESL have been articulated:

> Teaching ESL to competencies requires the instructional focus to be on functional competencies and life-coping skills. It is not what the students know about language but what they do with the language.
> Assessment is built in. Once the competency has been identified, it also serves as a means of evaluating student performance. Since it is performance based, assessment rests on whether the student can perform the competency or not. The only problem is to establish the level at which the student can perform the competency.
> Competencies are based on an assessment of student needs.
>
> (*op cit.*:11–13)

Within the literature, some writers use the term 'proficiency' as an alternative to 'competency' (see for example Higgs 1984). Richards, on the other hand, makes a clear distinction between 'competence' and 'proficiency', although he characterises the concept of proficiency in the same way as CBE characterises competency. This can be seen in the following quote:

> 1 When we speak of proficiency, we are not referring to knowledge of a language, that is, to abstract, mental and unobservable abilities. We are referring to performance, or, that is, to observable or measurable behaviour. Whereas competence refers to what we know about the rules of use and the rules of speaking of a language, proficiency refers to how well we can use such rules in communication.
> 2 Proficiency is always described in terms of real-world tasks, being defined with reference to specific situations settings purposes activities and so on.
> 3 In encapsulating the notion of skill, proficiency statements must always include a criterion.
> 4 It is assumed that proficiency in a given linguistic task involves the incorporating of a number of sub-skills or sub-tasks.

Richards goes on to say:

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> A proficiency-oriented language curriculum is not one which sets out to teach learners linguistic or communicative competence, since these are merely abstractions or idealisations: rather, it is organised around the particular kinds of communicative tasks the learners need to master and the skills and behaviours needed to accomplish them. The goal of a proficiency-based curriculum is not to provide opportunities for the learners to 'acquire' the target language: it is to enable learners to develop the skills needed to use language for specific purposes.
>
> (Richards 1985a:5)

The foregoing discussion demonstrates the confusion surrounding a number of key concepts relating to the nature of language. This confusion is due partly to the inconsistent application of terms to concepts and partly to confusion over the nature of the concepts themselves.

If the Richards line is followed, proficiency, simply put, refers to the ability to perform real-world tasks with a pre-specified degree of skill. For the moment we shall accept this definition, although it must be pointed out that problems arise when the concept is probed a little more rigorously. This will have to be done when we turn to the issue of the assessment of language proficiency in Chapter 8. We shall see there that the psychological reality of the construct 'proficiency' is itself problematic.

3.6 Towards a Generalised Language Curriculum Framework

In a recent study of curriculum processes Bartlett and Butler (1985) propose a generalised curriculum framework which sets out five interdependent but distinct categories. They call these categories the 'designed' curriculum, the 'developed' curriculum, the 'enacted' curriculum, the 'received' curriculum and the 'assessed' curriculum. The designed curriculum contains a statement of the general philosophy and policy guiding the curriculum. The developed curriculum consists of materials and the articulation of processes which are meant to operationalise the designed curriculum. The enacted curriculum consists of all the transactions between teachers and learners which are based on the materials and learning processes derived from the developed curriculum. The received curriculum represents the outcomes of the curriculum process (what the student actually learns).

It is often assumed that there exists a one-to-one relationship between the planned, implemented and assessed curriculum. In other words, it has been assumed that what is planned will be what gets taught, and

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that what gets taught will be what is learned. This assumption grossly over-simplifies what is, in fact, an extremely complex set of processes.

The assumption has been criticised by Parlett and Hamilton in the following way:

> An instructional system, when it is adopted, undergoes modifications that are rarely trivial. The instructional system may remain as a shared idea, abstract model, slogan or shorthand, but it assumes a different form in every situation. Its constituent elements are emphasised or de-emphasised, expanded or truncated, as teachers, administrators, technicians and students interpret and reinterpret the instructional system for their particular setting. In practice, objectives are commonly reordered, redefined, abandoned or forgotten.
>
> (Parlett and Hamilton 1983:14)

By assuming that 'planning equals teaching equals learning', curriculum designers have focused on the planned, and, to a certain extent, the assessed curriculum, and have tended to ignore the implemented curriculum. It is only fairly recently that the balance has started to be redressed and that curriculum designers have become interested in classroom-based research. Such research is beginning to reveal to us the complexities of the curriculum in action.

3.7 The Teacher and the Curriculum

The Bartlett and Butler study introduced in the preceding section investigates the attempt to develop a learner-centred curriculum model at a national level. In order to capture the complexities of the processes set in train by the decision to embrace a learner-centred philosophy, Bartlett and Butler find it necessary to add a new element which they call the negotiated curriculum. The negotiated curriculum refers to those curriculum activities which involve negotiation and consultation between teachers and students. It includes such processes as needs analysis, jointly conducted goal and objective setting exercises by teachers and learners, negotiation of preferred methodology, materials and learning activities, and the sharing of evaluation and self-evaluation procedures.

The research questions which Bartlett and Butler set out to explore are as follows:

How are Adult Migrant Education Programs selected and arranged?
How are curriculum decisions made and implemented in the AMEP?
What support structures are available to personnel in the AMEP?
How is a needs-based approach to curriculum planning enacted in the classroom?

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Data for the study were derived from a number of diverse sources which included documents, interview data, telephone consultancy data and data collected through the distribution of a questionnaire. Results of the data were ordered into an eight (States and Territories) by six (learning arrangements) by three (levels of decision making – national, state, local) matrix.

As a result of their study, Bartlett and Butler concluded that the learner-centred curriculum created a great deal of stress, that teachers were required to have a range of new skills if the ideals of the learner-centred curriculum were to become a reality, and that teachers required assistance and support in a number of areas. In particular, they concluded that assistance was required in the following areas:

> Needs assessment skills. The teachers require instruments and processes by which they can efficiently gather and prioritise student needs.
>
> Course guidelines. Teachers are asking for a broad framework within which they can negotiate the curriculum. They need to know what the students have done before and what will come after – in a form that does not stifle the negotiated curriculum.
>
> Course planning skills. The teachers are asking for planning skills that help them to negotiate a coherent, achievable set of objectives for a course, and then to plan a sequence of lessons to assist the students to attain the objectives.
>
> Bilingual help in negotiating the curriculum. The information exchange that is so crucial to the negotiated curriculum requires bilingual assistance in many classes.
>
> Continuity in the Programme. The needs-based model can easily give rise to a fragmented programme. Some teachers are caught in this bind and are asking for some form of programme management so that they feel their students are on a direct path to their goals.
>
> Educational counselling. In a needs-based model the size of the problem that confronts any individual teacher is directly related to the range and diversity of student needs. Teachers report that the negotiated curriculum becomes an impossible project if the student needs are very divergent. This is a key area where the teacher stress in negotiating the curriculum can be reduced – by forming a class group with a narrow range of needs. This requires the most efficacious use of educational counsellors, people who may themselves be curriculum developers, and who can direct students on a continuing basis into groups that match their needs.
>
> Conflict resolution. The opening up of the curriculum to negotiation will inevitably lead to some instances of conflict. The teachers reported in a survey that such conflict had arisen and many teachers had found suitable processes for resolving it.
>
> Teacher role specifications. The task of continually negotiating the curriculum with the students puts enormous strain on the teachers as is clearly evidenced in the survey.
>
> (*op cit.*:112–113)

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One of the issues raised by the Bartlett and Butler study, and, indeed, an issue underlying the adoption of a learner-centred approach to curriculum development with its implication of a greater professional burden on the classroom teacher, is the extent to which teachers see themselves as being responsible for the range of curriculum processes and activities that have been articulated in the preceding pages. In order to obtain supplementary evidence to that produced by Bartlett and Butler a survey was conducted of 35 teachers from a range of centre-based programmes in the Adult Migrant Education Program. The aim of the survey was to determine who, in the opinion of a representative group of teachers, should be principally responsible for carrying out initial and ongoing needs analysis, goal and objective setting, selecting and grading content, grouping learners, devising learning activities, instructing learners, monitoring and assessing learner progress and course evaluation.

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The Study

Data were collected through the distribution of the survey form in Table 3.4.

TABLE 3.4 RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRICULUM TASKS: SURVEY FORM

Indicate by giving a rating from 1 to 6 (1 = most important) who, in your opinion, should be primarily responsible for carrying out the following curriculum tasks. Give a rating from 1 to 6 for each curriculum task.

Key:

A Counsellor
B Bilingual resource person
C Curriculum advisor
D Teacher-in-charge of centre or program
E Classroom teacher
F Outside curriculum specialist

Curriculum processes	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*
Initial needs analysis						
Goal and objective setting						
Selecting/Grading content						
Ongoing needs analysis						
Grouping learners						
Devising learning activities						
Instructing learners						
Monitoring/Assessing progress						
Course/evaluation						

Results

Rankings, from most to least important, for each of the curriculum tasks are set out in Table 3.5.

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TABLE 3.5 RESULTS OF SURVEY

Initial needs analysis	*Devising learning activities*
Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher
Bilingual resource person	Curriculum advisor
Teacher-in-charge	Outside curriculum specialist
Counsellor	Teacher-in-charge
Curriculum advisor	Bilingual resource person
Outside curriculum specialist	Counsellor
Goal and objective setting	*Instructing learners*
Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher
Curriculum advisor	Bilingual resource person
Teacher-in-charge	Outside curriculum specialist
Counsellor	Curriculum advisor
Bilingual resource person	Teacher-in-charge
Outside curriculum specialist	Counsellor
Selecting and grading content	*Monitoring/Assessing progress*
Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher
Curriculum advisor	Teacher-in-charge
Teacher-in-charge	Counsellor
Bilingual resource person	Curriculum advisor
Counsellor	Bilingual resource person
Outside curriculum specialist	Outside curriculum specialist
Ongoing needs analysis	*Course evaluation*
Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher
Teacher-in-charge	Teacher-in-charge
Bilingual resource person	Curriculum advisor
Counsellor	Outside curriculum specialist
Curriculum advisor	Bilingual resource person
Outside curriculum specialist	Counsellor
Grouping learners	
Teacher-in-charge	
Classroom teacher	
Counsellor	
Curriculum advisor	
Bilingual resource person	
Outside curriculum specialist	

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These data show quite clearly that the teachers surveyed saw themselves as having primary responsibility for all of the curriculum tasks except that of grouping learners. This reflects the fact that most teachers are simply not involved in the grouping process, which is unfortunate, as deriving appropriate groupings is one of the keys to successful learner-centred curriculum development.

The most important individuals after the classroom teacher were seen as the teacher-in-charge, and centre-based curriculum advisor. The scepticism of the classroom teacher towards outside curriculum specialists is evident from the generally low ranking given to such a person for most of the curriculum tasks.

It should be pointed out that the teachers who took part in this survey, unlike some others within the Adult Migrant Education Program, do not have access either to counsellors or bilingual resource persons, which may account for the comparatively low ratings given to them for some of the tasks. The fact that curriculum advisors did rather well, despite the fact that the teachers did not have access to such personnel either, suggests that the teachers perceive the need for 'on the ground' assistance in the curriculum area.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, we have examined some of the theoretical and empirical foundations of a learner-centred approach to language curriculum development. These include theories of adult learning, communicative language teaching and the concept of language proficiency.

The chapter reports on three recent empirical investigations of teacher attitudes towards curriculum planning and communicative language teaching. For the group of teachers investigated, the concept of communicative language teaching is a salient one. The Bartlett and Butler study demonstrates some of the practical difficulties of developing a learner-centred model and indicates areas where teachers need assistance. The follow-up study indicates that teachers have accepted, in principle, the centrality of their place within an extended curriculum model.

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