

## **Content Selection and Organisation**

### **Introduction**

Articulating beliefs and defining the context might be considered as the foundation for the processes to follow when organizing a syllabus. Needs analysis and aims and objectives specification could go next. What follows, is what one must plan, organize, and the decisions about what should be taught first, second, third, and so on. Content is the information to be learnt at school. It is another term for knowledge. It is a compendium of facts, concepts, generalisation, principles and theories.

### **1. Procedures**

Smith (1965) in his report on procedures of curriculum development views that the curriculum could not possibly embrace all the accumulated knowledge. Indeed, only a fraction of what man has found out about his world can be included in a program of instruction. Content selection is based on the question “what knowledge is of most worth?” Such question cannot be answered in the abstract. “It can only be answered in a cultural context where the needs of the people, the resources, the level of technology and other relevant factors can be realistically assessed and taken into account” (op-cit). Smith suggests the following guidelines for the selection of the subject matter:

- The subject matter should be appropriate to the cultural level of the people: curriculum building must take into account the level of technical, and social development of the community and of the society. There must be a balance between the old and the new. The curriculum should include enough new knowledge and techniques to challenge the learner and to result in social progress, but not enough to overwhelm him with novelty.
- The subject matter should be closely related to the needs of the individual.
- The subject matter should build new needs: it must awaken the people to the improvements needed.

- The subject matter should conserve the things that have proved their worth: valuable things endure. If they satisfy human needs for generation after generation, then their worth is said to be established (f.eg. enduring ideas as freedom, equality...).
- The subject matter should foster intellectual growth and the development of specialized interests: there is a need for subject matter which will ensure the continued intellectual development of the individual beyond his school years and throughout his life as a member of society.
- The subject matter should be useful in everyday activities. Subject matter needed to develop the ability to do certain things.

## 2. Planning Levels

In ELT, Richards (2001), views that there are different levels of planning and development based on the aims and objectives established in the earlier step of curriculum development. Content selection and organisation have to go under several processes: **The course rationale, entry and exit levels, choice of content, and sequencing of content.**

### 2.1. The course rationale:

It is a brief description of the reasons for the course and the nature of it. It seeks to answer the questions:

- Who is the course for?
- What is the course about?
- What kind of teaching and learning will take place in the course?

When answering these questions, the course rationale describes the beliefs, values and goals that underlie the course. It would normally be a two- or three- paragraph statement that has been developed by those involved in planning and teaching a course and that serves to provide the justification for the type of teaching and learning that will take place in the course. It provides a statement of the course philosophy for anyone who may need such information including students, teachers and potential clients.

### 2.2. Entry and exit Levels:

In order to plan a language course, it is necessary to know the level at which the program will start and the level learners may be expected to reach at the end of the course.

This is what Richards (2001) refers to as entry and exit levels and is achieved through different ways among which proficiency levels before students enter a program and targeted proficiency levels at the end of it. Information may be available on students' entry level from their results on international proficiency tests such as TOEFL. In addition, specially designed tests may be needed to determine the level of students' language skills.

### **2.3. Choice of Content:**

It is probably the most basic issue in course design. Given that a course has to be developed to address a specific set of needs and to cover a given set of objectives, what will the content of the course look like? Decisions about course content reflect the planners' assumptions about the nature of language, language use, and language learning, what the most essential elements or units of language are, and how these can be organized as an efficient basis for language learning. According to Richards (2001), rough initial ideas are noted down as a basis for further planning and added to through group brainstorming. A list of possible topics, units, skills, and other units of course organization is then generated. One person suggests something that should go into the course, others add their ideas, and these are compared with other sources of information until clearer ideas about the content of the course are agreed on. Throughout this process, the statements of aims and objectives are continually referred to and both course content suggestions and the aims and objectives themselves are revised and fine-tuned as the course content is planned.

### **2.4. The distribution of content throughout the course:**

It is also known as planning the scope and sequence of the course. For Richards (2001), scope is concerned with the breadth and depth of coverage of items for the course (what range of content will be covered? and to what extent should each topic be studied?). On the other hand, the sequencing of content may be based on the following criteria: simple to complex, chronology, need, pre-requisite learning, whole to part or part to whole, and spiral sequencing. The planning of the course content involves mapping the course structure into a form and sequence that provide a suitable basis for teaching. This involves the selection of a syllabus framework (the choice of a syllabus type: grammatical, lexical, functional, situational...), and the development of instructional blocks (planning by modules, planning by units).