

Justifying course and task design in language teaching

First submission: December 2002

We often neglect to justify course and task design in language teaching in terms of current insight. This article articulates a number of general considerations that influence course design in communicative language teaching, as well as one specific condition: that the task or course must make language learning possible in the classroom. It concludes with a consideration of three essential criteria: that the task or course design embody a broad (communicative) perspective on language, that it provide learners with opportunities for focusing on the learning process itself, and that it use learners' personal experience as a starting point for tasks.

Die regverdiging van kursus- en taakontwerp by taalonderrig

Die ontwerpers van taalkursusse en -opdragte versuim dikwels om hul ontwerpe te regverdig aan die hand van eietydse insigte. Die artikel bespreek enkele algemene beginsels wat kursusontwerp beïnvloed. Dit identifiseer ook een oorkoepelende voorwaarde, naamlik dat die taak of kursus die aanleer van taal in die klaskamer moontlik moet maak. Die artikel sluit af met 'n bespreking van drie noodsaaklike kriteria in kursusontwerp: die belang van 'n breë kommunikatiewe perspektief op taal, leerders moet die geleentheid gebied word om op die leerproses self te fokus en leerders se persoonlike ervaring moet as basis gebruik word vir die ontwerp van opdragte.

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Language teaching is much more demanding, professionally, than many who teach language would care to admit. There are many reasons for underestimating the professional demands of being a language teacher. One is that many who today find themselves employed as language teachers have not trained for this specialisation. They may have had an enduring professional interest in language, or even in teaching things about language, but they may not be experts in fields other than literature or linguistics. This article proceeds from the assumption that it is a misunderstanding of the nature of language teaching, especially the teaching of a second or additional language, to conceive of it merely as teaching about the target language and its literature or structure. This is indeed a commonplace in language teaching, and has been so for more than twenty years, but, surprisingly, it is not always recognised in situations where language is being taught by erstwhile literature lecturers, who have been forced, by a complex of social, political and economic demands, to begin teaching language late in their academic careers.

This misunderstanding is not limited to more experienced teachers who join the ranks of language teaching professionals late in their teaching careers. Indeed, it is a misconception that is exacerbated when novice teachers (of whatever age) hold naïve views on the notion of “applied linguistics” as denoting the application of linguistic distinctions (cf Weideman 1999, 2002b). The solution to the language teaching problem, in such an understanding, is relatively simple: the more we teach our students to handle linguistic distinctions, the more competent they will become in the language. The design assumption for both language courses and the tasks that make up such courses is equally unproblematic: if students can, for example, distinguish between nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, it is taken for granted that they will know how to use them. Or, if they can identify the connectors that make a text cohesive, they will be able to employ them, and as a result write coherently. The learning mode is thus one in which students are required to display knowledge about language. If they do not know, if they fail to display the knowledge they are believed to need, it is assumed that they must be told. And if, either prior to or subsequent to being informed, they fail to display or apply that knowledge, immediate correction of errors is warranted. The

Acta Academica 2003: 35(3)

language teacher has to control every utterance by the student in the target language.

Of course, we now generally accept that this view is not valid (and on immediate error correction in particular, cf Truscott 1996). Knowing *about* cannot be equated with knowing *how*. As Gee (1998: 54) points out:

For most of us, playing a musical instrument, or dancing, or using a second language are skills that we attained by some mixture of acquisition and learning. But it is a safe bet that, over the same amount of time, people are better at these activities if acquisition predominated during that time. The point can be made using second language as an example: most people aren't very good at attaining a second language in any very functional way through formal instruction in a classroom. That's why teaching grammar is not a very good way of getting people to control a language.

1. Justifying language course design

The unsophisticated notion of applied linguistics referred to above has contributed much, I believe, to cynicism in some quarters about the usefulness of the discipline for language teaching. Can applied linguistics indeed assist language teachers? The thesis of this article is that it can, if we view it as a discipline of design. If applied linguistics is indeed a discipline of design (Weideman 1987), then the design we are dealing with in the case of language teaching inevitably embodies a solution to a language teaching problem. The kind of design that is proposed, however, is today far removed from the crude and inappropriate "application" of linguistic distinctions, and has, over six generations of applied linguistics (cf Weideman 2002b), become increasingly sophisticated.

One of the main tasks of such a discipline of design is to provide a justification for the designed solution to the language problem. Too often, when we write language courses, we ignore this need to justify the solution in terms of current insights into language learning. That is, we neglect to provide a rationale for the way in which the course approaches language learning. We forget to articulate the reasons for choosing to employ one kind of task rather than another, one technique instead of another, or one way of learning and not another. In the prefaces or introductions to our language coursebooks, we are

often more concerned to explain how the book is organised or how it may be used, than to account for how it was conceived.

This article seeks to examine some of these justifications, or design considerations. It seeks to do so selectively, in a way that will be clarified below, and not exhaustively. Though it will naturally refer to current and past work, it should not be read as a survey, or even as a state-of-the-art review of what is afoot in language task or course design. It sets out rather to demonstrate that being a professional language teacher calls for clear choices and demands a consistent approach in order to benefit professionally from the available alternatives. The argument will also be that to design and teach with consistency, one needs to make a certain commitment, and not be swayed by mere fashion or ideology.

Making a commitment does not mean that one's teaching must not change. Indeed, few would disagree with the injunction that one must remain open to alternatives, strengthening one's teaching with any new methods and techniques one encounters, which are in tune with one's beliefs about language learning. Initiates to the profession tend to forget that behaving professionally may very well require one to change one's beliefs about how languages are learned in the classroom. However, the challenge is to develop a new style of language task design and language teaching, aligned with one's convictions about learning. The professional language teacher strives to attain such integrity.

2. Requirements for a communicative approach

Most teachers today would profess adherence to a communicative approach. What are the requirements for consistency in the courses used in this kind of language teaching?

In the first instance, communicative language teaching course-books usually embody numerous new techniques that language teachers have to be able to use before they can claim to have mastered the art of communicative language teaching in mass-learning settings. In communicative language teaching (CLT), the most important of these techniques is probably the information gap (sometimes called information exchange) technique, but there are many others, such as role-

play, games and discussions, incorporating this foundation. My own experience as a trainer of teachers shows that one can never assume that teachers, even those who claim to be communicative in their approach, are acquainted with this fundamental technique. By implication, they are therefore not conversant with the results of the major, sustained research of Teresa Pica and her associates, which has confirmed, by means of painstaking empirical analyses, how beneficial negotiating meaning across an information gap can be for learning an additional language. This research, pursued over many years, has provided a thorough justification for CLT, and for the information gap technique.¹

Though unified on the use of this technique, which also underlies other CLT task types, such as certain warm-up exercises, role-play, drama techniques, games, and so forth, CLT is variously interpreted. For the sake of this discussion, we may assume that there are four main interpretations of CLT: the use of authentic texts (cf Widdowson 1978; Cook 1981), mainstream CLT (cf Wilkins 1976), “humanistic” approaches (cf Maley & Duff 1978; Stevick 1980; Rinvoluceri 1982; Frank & Rinvoluceri 1983; Wright *et al* 1979) and combinations of these, especially of the latter two (cf Krashen & Terrell 1983; Terrell 1985; Roberts 1986). We can learn certain things about task and course design from each of the four directions distinguishable in CLT (cf Weideman 2002a). The relative contribution of each of these four interpretations (cf Roberts 1982) to the goals of teaching an additional language can be summarised as follows:

Direction/interpretation	Characteristic
Authentic texts	‘Real-life’ language; authenticity
Mainstream CLT/‘British’ school	Emphasis on the language (‘L’) needs of students in terms of functions of language use
Humanistic	Emphasis on emotional barriers to learning (‘P’ for psychological)
Combinations of ‘L’ and ‘P’	Promoting ‘natural’ learning

1 Cf Pica & Doughty 1985; Varonis & Gass 1985; Doughty & Pica 1986; Porter 1986; Pica *et al* 1987; Pica 1987; Pica *et al* 1989; 1993; Pica 1994; Walz 1996; Pica 1996; Foster 1998; Oliver 2000; for another summary and review of numerous other studies, cf Nunan 1991.

If we consider the first direction within communicative teaching, we note the great importance attached to realism, which is why this direction uses authentic texts. This means that language teaching must be as closely related as possible to real language use, as well as to the present and prospective needs of the student (this is also very important in mainstream communicative teaching). Language in the classroom must always have at least a spark of authenticity and actuality, because it must be aimed at a goal outside the classroom. Language teaching which exists only for its own sake is an idol that must eventually perish since, like all idols, it feeds upon itself. For many coursebooks initially devised for CLT, the authenticity of the texts used was of great importance. Though the notion of authenticity has been debated and scrutinised, this second requirement for course design in CLT has endured right up to the present. It is also embodied in the second of Nunan's five characteristic features of communicative tasks, just as the linking of language learning with a goal outside the classroom refers to the fifth feature (Nunan 1991: 279).

Apart from involving new techniques and authenticity, there is a third criterion of CLT task and course design. This is derived from mainstream CLT, and may be stated as follows: in a general communicative language course (in other words in one which has not been designed to cater only for specific needs and purposes) no language medium or skill should, without good reason, receive preferential treatment over any other. Reading is just as important as writing, speaking or listening in our lingual communication with others, and *vice versa*.

Indeed, there is a rather widespread misconception among teachers today that the communicative approach is merely some kind of perfected "oral approach". This is not so, because communication occurs in media other than speech. It is understandable that, after trying for decades to "get the students to speak" the language, teachers would easily misunderstand the point of the approach. But just as all those years of encouraging students to speak have not necessarily been in vain, all the centuries of intensive study of the written word, as well as the literate state of modern First World culture and the time spent on writing, listening and reading skills in foreign and second language teaching, should not now be summarily dismissed as inappropriate.

Furthermore, in communicative teaching, at long last and with what seems an enormous amount of persuasion and argumentative energy, language teaching has achieved a broader perspective on language and its various uses than ever before. I shall return to this point below, but wish to observe here that it would be a great pity if applied linguists and language teachers allowed this opportunity to slip through their fingers by reverting to the old ways. Language teachers will have to shoulder the tremendous responsibility of developing language teaching in a meaningful way if we are to make good the much richer idea of language that we have today. In particular, and with reference to Nunan's (1991: 279) first feature of communicative tasks, this broader perspective on language acknowledges its interactive nature, from which it follows that language teaching must emphasise "learning to communicate through interaction in the target language".

In addition, the 'L' (for "language") and the 'P' (for psychological) directions within CLT (for these distinctions, cf Roberts 1982) alert us to learners' needs. These encompass both the functional language needs and emotional needs of learners. In respect of the latter, the alternative approaches that make up some of the "humanistic" ways of teaching (cf Stevick 1980 for an early exposition) also challenge us to design our language teaching in such a way that learners can have a greater say in determining their own curriculum, and so controlling how their needs are met.

Finally, we can learn from the 'P' emphases in CLT that the atmosphere in which language learning takes place is critical. It is telling that, for many who become wholly fluent in another language, this fluency is achieved outside the classroom. We must try to replicate in the classroom the conditions that make language learning successful in other environments. In the next section, we shall take a closer look at a design instrument that can assist in achieving this.

3. A stress index for language methods

This article began by articulating a number of assumptions that make language teaching, as well as language teachers, professional. To become a professional, every language teacher should eventually be able to design his or her own teaching and learning materials. In

designing language teaching materials, one would probably start with a broad set of principles, such as that described in the previous section. But there are also other, more specific criteria that can help one to articulate the rationale for a course.

One such instrument that I have used is a stress index for the language teaching methods one may use in designing a course. The index is inspired by a similar kind of matrix articulated by Lightbown & Spada (1993: 71), which compares “natural” acquisition outside the classroom with traditional and communicative teaching. However, it was developed from a slightly different angle so as to highlight the way in which different methods and the tasks that they require either reduce or generate stress, anxiety and tension in the language classroom.

Let us take as an example the design of a course for beginners. Would there be any justification for any of the techniques and methods normally used in such courses, such as songs, rhymes and chants (cf Graham 1978, 1986)? Is there any use for story-telling? And what rationale is there for using other techniques, such as TPR (Total Physical Response) or even the Silent Way, where the teacher is completely, or almost completely silent?

The stress index measures the degree of anxiety or stress generated by various techniques in terms of four parameters: the obligation on the learner to perform; whether the technique requires a verbal response from the learner; whether the language performance of the individual is public, *ie* in front of others, and the teacher’s ability to evaluate the individual.

The stress index assumes that the problem for (young) learners is that they may be unwilling to take risks. This is deemed to be bad for language learning, since risk-takers make better language learners. Of course, this is also the case with older learners, and even more so with adults, especially where cultural norms may prohibit risk taking, *ie* make them unwilling to lose face in front of others.

The problem is that not all learners are risk-takers. The solution, therefore, is to create an environment in which it is acceptable to take risks, one in which a possible loss of face is not the end of the world. The elimination of stress would create such an environment. We may

rate the various methods and techniques in terms of the four stress-generating categories with a plus [+] if the feature is present or a minus [-] if it is absent. The completed matrix is given at a later point, so readers may take the opportunity to complete it here and compare their version with the author's interpretation.

Comparison: different methods for beginners

	Individual learner wants to perform	Verbal response required	Individual performance is public	Teacher can evaluate individual
Stories				
Songs & rhymes				
TPR				
Warm-up exercises				
Information gap				
Silent Way				

It may be assumed that, when the teacher tells beginners a story, this is normally an activity involving the whole class with little or no pressure on individual learners to perform. There is no reason to think that individual learners would feel any tension or anxiety, except when, after telling the story, the teacher may ask individual learners questions about the narrative, testing their knowledge. In the first column, next to 'Stories', one may therefore enter a '-' sign, as stories do not generate stress.

How does story-telling fare in terms of the other criteria? It requires no verbal response from the learner (the teacher tells the story to the whole class), and therefore we may again enter a '-' in this column. Since there is no individual performance, and the performance is not public, we enter a third minus. As regards the fourth criterion, the teacher may evaluate individuals afterwards, but, since the intention of telling a story is certainly not to do so, but to expose everyone to the new language, we may reasonably enter a minus here as well.

It appears, therefore, as if story-telling is a very suitable technique to use for beginners. In terms of the four criteria, it generates hardly any stress.

How does the second technique, singing songs or chanting rhymes, fare? Certainly, individual learners may wish to perform but, since this is a class activity, their performance is not public. Also, the learner is shielded from evaluation by the teacher because these are class activities, so here too one may enter a minus. The only potentially stress-generating activity would be that the learner is required to make a verbal response (albeit in a group). So this technique scores at worst two pluses and two minuses but, realistically, probably a single plus and three minuses.

Again, this seems to be a very useful technique to use with beginners, and the stress index provides a rationale for it.

The use of the total physical response (TPR) and information gap techniques begins to tell a slightly different story. In TPR, the learner is likely to want to perform; that performance is public, and the teacher may be able to evaluate it. The only absent feature is that a verbal response is not required. Three pluses and one minus therefore make TPR potentially quite a stressful activity. For use with beginners, one might therefore suggest that teachers modify their evaluation, and not “score” pupils’ performances, so as to lessen the stress.

Even though one thinks of warm-up exercises as fun, it is interesting to see that the index also scores them as potentially highly stressful (certainly higher than the first two techniques). Warm-up tasks require the learner to perform; the performance normally requires verbal output, and it is generally public. Again, one would suggest that teachers should not introduce evaluation here, in order to keep the anxiety level low.

The same is true of information gap tasks. The individual has to perform; there is a verbal response, and that response is at least partly public (information gap tasks are ideally done in pairs of learner, so there is the chance of making a fool of oneself in front of at least one of one’s peers). The only factor that minimises stress is that, where the whole class is engaged in such an activity, the teacher has the opportunity to evaluate only one pair of learners at a time, and learners are therefore shielded from this potential embarrassment. Of course, as in the case of story-telling, if the teacher decides to evaluate the completion of the task afterwards, there will be extra anxiety. Some teachers require pairs of learners to complete the information gap

task again in front of the whole class. If this practice is used, the index suggests that it should be used sparingly, and only after proper rehearsal, when learners are confident enough to attempt it. Still, three pluses and one minus mean that this kind of task may generate a good deal of anxiety.

As far as the Silent Way is concerned, however, one may only conclude that it is very stressful, as confirmed by many learners in Silent Way classes. It scores four pluses. Does this mean that the Silent Way should not be used with beginners? Would it be insensitive to expose such learners to so much stress? We shall return to this question after looking at the completed matrix:

Comparison: different methods for beginners

	Individual learner wants to perform	Verbal response required	Individual performance is public	Teacher can evaluate individual
Stories	-	-	-	-
Songs & rhymes	-/+	+	-	-
TPR	+	-	+	+/-
Warm-up exercises	+	+	+	-
Information gap	+	+	+	-
Silent Way	+	+	+	+

The completed matrix shows a progression from less stressful to more stressful activities. Where the use of stories scores a zero on the index (no pluses, with stress-generating tasks therefore being absent), songs and rhymes score $1\frac{1}{2}$, TPR $2\frac{1}{2}$, warm-up exercises and information gap tasks 3 each, and the Silent Way the maximum of 4.

Does this mean that we should exclude the latter three types of task from a beginners' course? The answer is no. The gradual build-up from low-stress to high-stress activities, including the latter three types of task, forms the justification for at least one course for beginners, *Starting English* (Weideman & Rousseau 1996). But the index does caution the teacher using or designing the course to take things slowly. In fact, the use of highly stressful techniques such as the Silent Way in *Starting English* provides a good jolt to learners at exactly

the time when they need to emerge from the protective emotional shell that low-scoring techniques provide.

The rationale for using several techniques is thus clarified by the measuring instrument that we have used above. It is offered here as one example of how teachers can make deliberate choices in selecting tasks from a range of techniques. It provides, if you will, a justification for a reasoned eclecticism, or combination of methods.

4. Language teaching that makes learning possible

The preceding section dealt with using, or using with care, or even avoiding — at least at the beginning of a course — certain language learning techniques and the tasks that emanate from them. The justification for the use or avoidance of techniques proceeds from the presence or absence of verbal output required from the learner, among other things and the degree of anxiety and stress that each technique generates.

These two factors lie at the heart of the rationale for the fourth interpretation of CLT referred to above, the “natural” approach, but can be applied in equal measure to other methods as well, since all methods now take as their goal of making language learning possible in the classroom. In fact, this purpose is probably the single overriding criterion for the design of any language teaching material.

In the synoptic diagram below, we recast the factors in terms of the notion that learners should be exposed to as much language as possible, at or slightly above their own level of understanding, but must not necessarily be forced to produce the target language right from the start. There are strong arguments in the literature against early oral production, which generates a degree of stress which can hamper learning. The diagram uses the same data as the matrix in the previous section.

The argument of this diagram assumes the following:

- One of the key design criteria for language teaching is that it must make learning free from embarrassment, fear or anxiety.
- This criterion derives from the belief that good language learners take risks. If too much potential embarrassment is involved in the

learning environment, risk-taking behaviour is inhibited — to the detriment of language learning.

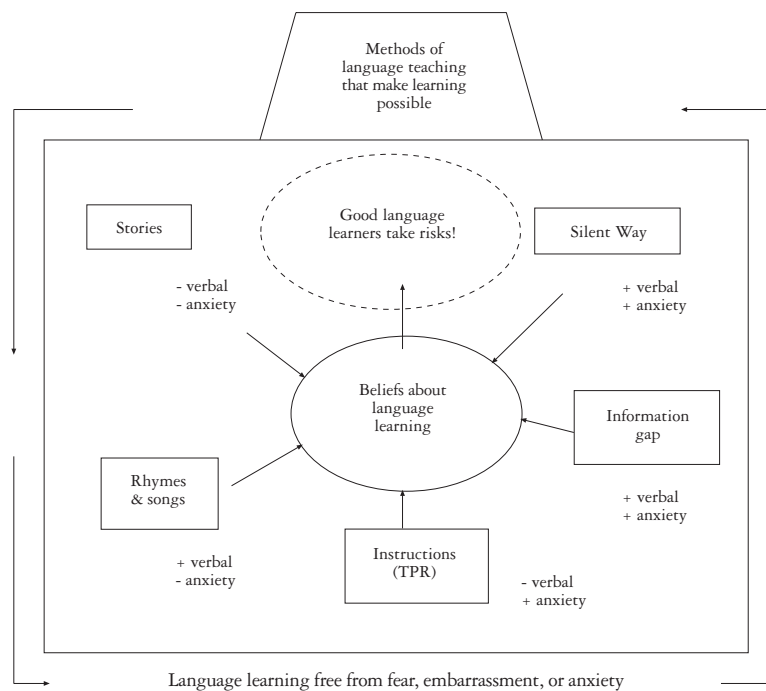
- In order to create an environment that encourages risk-taking, the language teacher must design the course in such a way as to neutralise two risk-inhibiting factors: verbal output from the learner and the accompanying anxiety — at least initially.
- It is better to start a beginners' course with activities such as stories (which require no verbal output and therefore create no anxiety), rhymes and songs (which, although they require verbal output, do not heighten anxiety).
- TPR is probably preferable to information gap activities initially, since it requires no verbal output.
- The stress-inducing work required by information gap tasks and in the Silent Way is best left for later in a beginners' course.

With the necessary adaptations, one may apply these design criteria to any course. The adaptations would depend, for example, on the level of the course (beginner, intermediate, or advanced), or its goal (academic reading proficiency, for instance), or external and logistical constraints (such as scarce resources, cf Habte 2001).

5. Another critical parameter: our view of language

Language teaching design also depends on another crucial parameter: the task or course designer's view or theory of language. Above, I noted a fourth general parameter of CLT course design: its broader, richer perspective on language. This is a perspective that goes beyond the restrictive view of language which would limit it to a combination of sound, form and meaning, or, in technical terms, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements. In line with socially enriched views of language, the broader framework for language maintains that language is not only expressive, but communicative, intended to mediate and negotiate human interaction. For language teaching studies and applied linguistics, this richer perspective goes back at least as far (cf Weideman 1987: 212-30) as the seminal work of Hymes (1971) on communicative competence, and the tradition built on this sociolinguistic idea encompassed the work of linguists and applied linguists such as Searle (1969), Halliday

Weideman/Justifying course and task design



(1978, 1985) and Wilkins (1976). For a generation of linguists that has had to carry a heavy burden of syntactic analysis, it is perhaps salutary to note that this broader perspective has been present in language analysis for at least 60 years. Hjelmslev (1961: 1127) in lofty tones noted as early as 1943 that, after a “temporary restriction” of its field of vision, linguistic theory

[...] is led by inner necessity to recognize not merely the linguistic system [...] but also man and human society behind language, and all man’s sphere of knowledge through language. At that point linguistic theory has reached its prescribed goal: *humanitas et universitas*.

Let us take one more example of how design considerations, and in particular the view of language subscribed to by the author, influence a coursebook. This example lies at the other extreme from the

beginners' course of the preceding discussion, since it derives from work done in what is known as language for special purposes (LSP) courses. It is a workbook of academic language proficiency (Weideman 2003) specifically intended for students who have been identified, normally through a standardised measure, as having too low a level of language proficiency for university study, and thus being at risk academically.

After indicating that the purpose of the course is to enable students to become increasingly competent in communicating productively and perceptively by means of the language that they use for academic matters, the workbook first relates this purpose to the general outcomes now required of studies in higher education. The construct (in the sense of language blueprint, or perspective) for the course is formulated in the introduction as follows:

If you successfully complete the course, i.e. perform at the appropriate, adequate level in your academic language, you will specifically be able to:

- understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;
- interpret the use of metaphor and idiom in academic usage, perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;
- understand relations between different parts of a text, be aware of the logical development of an academic text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;
- interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and have a sensitivity for the meaning that they convey, and the audience that they are aimed at;
- interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;
- make distinctions between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments; distinguish between cause and effect, classify, categorise and handle data that make comparisons;
- see sequence and order, do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purposes of an argument;
- know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;

Weideman/Justifying course and task design

- understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and
- make meaning (e.g. of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence (Weideman 2003: v-vi).²

What should be clear from this excerpt dealing with the specific outcomes of the course is that it is informed by a perspective that goes beyond the notion that language is merely made up of sound, form, grammar and meaning. It attempts to define the “secondary” discourse (Gee 1998) of academic interaction in ways that are broader than the conventional, structural definitions of language. It also pays attention to cognitive processing through language, something that is of the utmost importance in academic literacy development. It assumes, in other words, that learners need to seek information, process that information, and produce (new) information, and to do so in authentic and realistic ways (authenticity was the very first general principle discussed above). It further assumes that students need to do all of these things independently, if they are to master this discourse.

In addition, the workbook also makes use of design criteria similar to those of the beginners’ courses discussed earlier. For instance, it is clear that the workbook designer considers it beneficial for learners to achieve as much language production as possible (cf too Porter 1986: 214f, 220); thus it contains some 200 tasks of varying duration. Learners are encouraged to correct themselves rather than to expect correction from an authority, like the teacher. In various instances they are led to formulate for themselves the criteria by which their productive work, *eg* their academic writing, is to be assessed. All of this is in accordance with the findings of a number of studies, such as those reported on by Nunan (1991: 289; cf too Lightbown & Spada 1993: 86; Porter 1986: 202, 210f, 214, 219), that “learners are capable of correcting each other successfully”; that they produce more language with other learners than with language authority figures, and that they “do not learn each other’s errors”.

2 I am indebted to Nan Yeld, Alan Cliff and their colleagues at the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP) of the University of Cape Town for this understanding of academic literacy, which was slightly adapted for the purposes of the workbook (cf too Blanton 1994).

6. A final two design criteria

The workbook being used as an example also fulfils the other two criteria mentioned by Nunan (1991: 279):

- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the language process itself.
- An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

The introduction to the workbook points out to students that they should think of their whole day as a language class, ie as a series of opportunities to practise and become fluent in the language of higher education, which stems from the first of Nunan's criteria. Also, there are exercises in which students articulate, and are subsequently provided with the opportunity to investigate and critique, their own preconceptions about language learning and the language learning strategies that flow from these.³ The personal experiences of learners are taken as the starting point for numerous tasks, as required by Nunan's second criterion. For example, in a warm-up exercise, some items of personal information from each student are used in an information gap exercise. So, too, in subsequent tasks, students are required to investigate their own and their group's eating habits or their study, relaxation and sleep patterns.

These final two criteria demonstrate again how, in designing language teaching courses, we may make use of current insights to enrich our work as professionals. Our expectations of the academic research in all the various studies that underpin these insights must never be inflated to the point of thinking that we have reached a conclusive answer, but must rather be integrated into our course design. The examples provided in this article have attempted to show a number of ways in which such integration can be achieved.

7. Teaching with integrity

The design criteria discussed above underscore the thesis that designing language teaching is a deliberate, professional task, arising out of

3 For a summary, cf Lepota & Weideman 2002; cf also Wenden & Rubin 1987; Oxford 1990; Chamot & O'Malley 1990; Cohen 1998.

assumptions we make on how language learning takes place, or how we can enhance such learning in the classroom. As teachers, we commit ourselves to styles of teaching that give expression to these assumptions, and to designs that integrate our beliefs into the tasks and courses we use.

When teachers enter the language teaching profession, at least at the tertiary level, they may well do so reluctantly, for it may happen under institutional pressure to preserve their livelihoods in the face of falling enrolments in fields such as literature and linguistics. For such otherwise experienced but new language teachers, there is very little incentive to teach professionally. They may be demoralised by institutional factors beyond their control; they may have had to give up their life-long interests; they may still feel threatened by the abruptness of institutional change. Becoming a professional language teacher in an atmosphere of change and instability is a tall order.

Should they choose to do so, however, a good place to start would be to locate their own beliefs about language learning within any of a number of traditional and current approaches to language teaching (cf Larsen-Freeman 1986; Richards & Rodgers 1986; Weideman 2002a). My argument in this regard has been that teachers will feel more comfortable using any of these methods if they understand their assumptions about language learning. Specifically, to become a professional teaching with integrity, one must understand that the motivation for preferring one method to another lies in these assumptions. A method finds its roots in a certain belief about language learning. It is an expression of these beliefs: the style of teaching employed by the teacher is attuned to the beliefs about language learning that inform such a style.

Looking at language teaching methods as the expression of how one believes language learning happens is an important way of making sense of a whole array of professional choices for the language teacher. The most important of these, probably, is how one designs language tasks and courses. In this respect, the argument is that it is better for one's professional development to select a method that is in tune with one's own beliefs as a language teacher. Therefore, though one may consider a number of different methods, none of those is by implication superior. There is little doubt, however, about which are

Acta Academica 2003: 35(3)

the most influential. The communicative approach is still, in a substantial sense, both the current orthodoxy and the future direction of language teaching.

What direction the approach itself, as well as language teaching in general, will take in the future may depend on how well, or how badly, it combines with other methods. There are a number of alternative methods to consider, even for those who profess a firm commitment to CLT.

Such alternatives are important, especially where they inform and enrich the design of language teaching. A language teacher becomes fully professional only when he or she is able to design materials for learning. Invariably, the design of language teaching is informed by current orthodoxy and strong traditions. Too many concessions to traditional ways may dilute and detract from the innovative; too many new, alternative techniques may create contradictions.

This article has discussed a number of general and specific design principles, as well as three additional ones, which relate to the course designer's view of language, attend to the learning process itself, and use learners' own experiences as a starting point. Integrating these principles into tasks and courses is the challenge one faces if one wishes not only to teach, but also to design with integrity.

Though one's teaching can be informed by research, the crucible in which the future of language teaching will be decided is the classroom. It is my belief that the future of language teaching lies in the hands of committed and competent teachers, who can design language teaching materials and teach language with integrity, because they have achieved an alignment between their beliefs about how language is learned and the way that they teach.

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