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Curriculum Goals: Bridging the Gap**

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Initial English Teacher Education and English Curriculum Goals: Bridging the Gap

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Introduction

Over the past 10-20 years educational planners in many Asian countries have introduced one or more new English language curricula into their state school systems. The expected outcomes of these are stated in terms that imply more communication-oriented, learner centred approaches to the language teaching-learning process. In most of these countries, despite perhaps (as in India) having official status, English remains a foreign not a second language. Consequently for the majority of school based learners the language classroom represents the sole regular site for language learning. This being so, the range and type of learning opportunities that English language teachers feel willing and able to provide, will significantly determine the extent to which learners develop their English proficiency in a manner consistent with stated national curriculum aims. The extent to which initial teacher education (ITE) programmes for English teachers in a country are designed to prepare teachers to help learners achieve such aims is thus one critical factor in determining whether national English curriculum aims can actually be met.

The paper has four main parts. In the first it considers some recent research into the extent to which stated English curriculum aims are currently being met in state school systems, both in the immediate Asian region and further afield. Next it looks at extracts from a number of regional curriculum documents, together with certain now mainstream themes from the teacher education literature, and discusses what they imply for the knowledge and abilities that an English teacher ITE programme seeking to prepare trainees to implement such curricula ought to contain. The third section briefly reminds us that any ITE programme will be deeply influenced by the wider context in which it is situated, and so will need to adapt its content and format to reflect its own contextual reality. In the final part, while fully acknowledging contextual differences, the paper offers suggestions as to what some core components of an English teacher ITE programme preparing trainees to meet 'communicative' curriculum aims, might be. The paper concludes with a short discussion of the need for teachers to continue to be supported after their initial training.

TESOL curricula and classrooms in different EFL contexts

As a result of globalisation, however we define this term, English has become a core subject in school and university curricula in most countries in the Asia TEFL region, as elsewhere. Nunan (2003) in a recent survey of the TESOL situation in a number of Asian countries points out that

Few TESOL professionals can deny seeing the day-to-day results of the socio-political phenomenon of global English in the policies they encounter. Anecdotal evidence suggests that governments around the world are introducing English as a compulsory subject at younger and younger ages. [...] In business, industry and government workers are increasingly expected to develop proficiency in English. These demands for English offer opportunities to the TESOL profession, but at the same time they have created many challenges for TESOL educators internationally. (Nunan 2003:591)

If the demand for English is increasing, what in fact do countries see as desirable goals for learners in their state school systems and to what extent are they successfully achieving them? Nunan's article looks for answers to these questions in school systems across the East Asian region. His findings suggest

that in many (if not most countries) there is a significant gulf between official statements of what outcomes the curriculum is intended to achieve and the classroom realities in which such outcomes are supposed to be achieved. The main burden of trying to reconcile this mismatch falls, as always, on classroom teachers. A summary of his findings is given in Table 1 below (unless otherwise stated page numbers refer to Nunan 2003).

Table 1. Curriculum goals and classroom realities in some Asian countries

<i>Country / Region</i>	<i>Curriculum goals stated in terms of</i>	<i>Classroom realities</i>
Japan (Junior High)	Implementing communicative activities to enable students to communicate their feelings or thoughts (600)	Emphasis is on reading and writing skills to help learners pass entrance exams to senior high school and, later, university
Korea	Teaching English through English (601)	Teachers do not have the language proficiency, and therefore the confidence, to do so
Malaysia	A Task Based Approach (602)	Formal top down traditional teaching methods persist. A significant proportion of teachers do not have sufficient command of the English language to conduct classes with confidence.
Vietnam	'The prevailing rhetoric appears to be communicative' (604)	Materials present a lot of exercises on grammar and reading comprehension. Students cannot use the language for communicating.
Taiwan Primary and JHS	Initial basic communicative ability (603)	Teachers who have completed training have difficulty with English skills and teaching pedagogy
Hong Kong	Communicative language teaching, task based learning and learner centredness. (approx 90% of schools English Mol until late 1990s) (599)	A lack of trained teachers Teachers' own language proficiency inadequate. Government and business dissatisfaction with the proficiency of students emerging from school system
China	The latest syllabuses... are based on the functional use of English and concepts such as CLT and learner centredness are very much in evidence (Nunan 2002:5)	Traditional transmission based teaching Textbook followed very closely. Emphasis on grammar reading and writing for knowledge based exams. (Wu and Fang 2002)

From the above we can see that in the countries listed there is frequently a mismatch between the outcomes that the curriculum documents hope for and

- Teachers' own language proficiency
- Teaching methods used
- Content of high stakes examinations
- The content/design of teaching materials

The problem is of course not region-specific. If we look across the Pacific the invitation to a recent (April 2004) symposium in Chile noted that

...the teaching and learning of English within the Chilean state schools system needs to be improved so that students leaving school can function in English. Grammar continues to dominate ELT in all areas: initial teacher training, curricula and consequently classroom teaching and learning. A large proportion of teachers of English within the system lack appropriate levels of English themselves, and poorly resourced schools with large class sizes and a lack of motivation to learn English exacerbate the problem. (2004:1)

Similarly in Egypt we find that

Meeting the national imperative to learn English has been hampered by a poor supply of suitably qualified Teachers, often lacking proficiency in English themselves [...] whose training makes no reference to the constraints that might conflict with the philosophy of teaching materials [...] where the methodology component is quite shallow and consequently most classroom teachers do not fully understand the principles of CLT in practice. (Gahin and Myhill 2001 : 3-11)

While in Saudi Arabia

The gap between the content of teacher education programmes and the needs of the classroom widens. After graduating from University many teachers lack essential English skills, especially the ability to speak the language. (Al Hamzi 2003: 342)

Striking similarities are apparent between all the above accounts. In each, teachers' lack both the language proficiency and the professional understanding and skills needed in order to implement official curricula in their classrooms. In such situations not only will the curriculum aims fail to be

met, but teachers' professional confidence and self-esteem is likely to be negatively affected. This is in turn likely to communicate itself to learners and so, in complex and many faceted ways, affect their motivation for and attitude to school language learning. Ultimately the likely result is, as Nunan concludes below, to erode public confidence in the value of school based language education in which such large amounts of money have been invested.

The single most pervasive outcome of this study is that English Language policies and practice have been implemented, often at significant cost to other aspects of the curriculum, without a clearly articulated rationale and without detailed consideration of the costs and benefits of such practices and policies on the countries in question. *Furthermore there is a widely articulated belief that, in public schools at least, these policies and practices are failing.* (Nunan 2003:609- Italics added)

The introduction of curriculum changes will initially have affected serving teachers most profoundly. However, the above evidence suggests that more than a decade after reforms were introduced, initial English teacher education in many contexts has made little progress in developing teachers who are able to help learners achieve the hoped for curriculum outcomes. ITE does therefore seem to continue to be one of the main barriers to developing successful state school based provision of the 'English for communication' aims of national curriculum statements.

In the following section I look at a number of extracts from published curriculum documents and at a limited number of themes that are increasingly common in the wider teacher education literature, to try to identify what an initial English teacher education programme that does try to prepare trainees to work with 'communicative' national curriculum aims, might look like.

Curriculum statements and TE literature – implications for ITE

The first three rows of Table 2 below, consider the implications for teacher knowledge and abilities of some of the curriculum aims from three Asian countries. In the final two rows ideas from the growing literature about teacher learning from outside the region are introduced together with what they imply, since what we know about how teachers seem to learn is potentially relevant to ITE programmes in any discipline.

Table 2. Extracts from curriculum statements and the teacher education literature: some implications for TESOL ITE (all italics inserted)

Country	Some implications for what English teachers need
<p>Korea (Park 2002) The 6th and 7th revised national curriculum the goals and objectives of English education for elementary and secondary students have focused on <i>acquiring English communicative competence</i> [...] This is turn has required teachers to <i>shift their instructional approach from the Grammar translation method to the communicative and functional approach</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good enough language proficiency to feel confident about using a communicative instructional approach. • An understanding of what communicative competence means, and to what extent it is teachable. • A range of techniques and activities for promoting the development of such competence • Ability to identify areas of competence that learners need to develop.
<p>Japan (Ministry of Education 2003:4) Through the repetition of activities making use of English as a means of communication, <i>the learning of grammar and vocabulary should be enhanced and communicative abilities in L, S, R, W should be fostered</i>. To carry out such instruction effectively it is important for the <i>teachers to establish many situations where SS can communicate in English and routinely conduct classes principally in English</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good language proficiency to carry out classes in English. • Understanding of the language system. • Understanding of the processes underlying the development of skills. • A range of techniques for providing opportunities to communicate. • Knowledge of their learners and so what they will be interested in communicating about. • Ability to vary their own classroom roles
<p>China (Berry 2003:2) According to the new curriculum teachers' roles will be very different from the past. Teachers are no longer merely informants of knowledge. In addition to <i>empowering SS with subject knowledge</i> they are <i>curriculum adaptors</i>. Teachers should decide on the teaching content, design tasks as well as select and develop materials which they think appropriate for their SS. They are planners scheduling the teaching content and materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal language proficiency sufficient for all that follows • Understanding of the language system. • Understanding curriculum aims, and the view of language and learning on which they are based. • Teaching techniques compatible with curriculum aims • Understanding that teaching content and approaches need to be matched with the realities of their own context. • Understanding of their own learners • Ability to design and evaluate materials

<p>USA, UK, Portugal (Harris 2003, Leithwood 2002, Flores and Shiroma 2003)</p> <p>In a world in which there are frequent changes to what is expected of classroom teachers, it is important that teachers are used <i>to cooperating with and learning from each other</i>. Novice teachers especially need <i>chances to try things out and to refine them through practice and through interaction with others</i>. If teachers are to be reflective professionals in terms of their practices and beliefs that underlie them, <i>ITT courses have to be organised accordingly and provide chances to understand, try out and reconceptualise</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for teachers to try out approaches and techniques in practice. • Opportunities to collaborate with fellow trainees and/or more experienced teachers.. • Opportunities to get learner, peer and tutor feedback on their practice, and to rethink and retry. • Understanding that the trying out, thinking about (with others) the results and retrying is an ongoing process throughout a teachers' professional life (lifelong learning). • Becoming used to sharing ideas, problems, and opinions with colleagues.
<p>USA/UK/Australasia</p> <p>Constructivist views of learning (Hunter and Benson 1997: 93)</p> <p>Individuals do not see the world as it is, rather they see it as they are, as they have learned it to be.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainees arrive with what they have 'learned' the world of education to be. • They will bring a view of educational institutions and teachers and learners, to their training. • They have had a long apprenticeship of observation (Lortie 1975) in terms of their own school experiences. • We will need to convincingly justify any major belief shifts that we wish them to make. • Belief changes take a long time.

Table 2 suggests that English language teacher ITE that tries to take account of some principles of teacher learning to prepare trainees to meet curriculum goals of the kinds represented by the extracts above, will need to provide trainees with both knowledge and abilities:

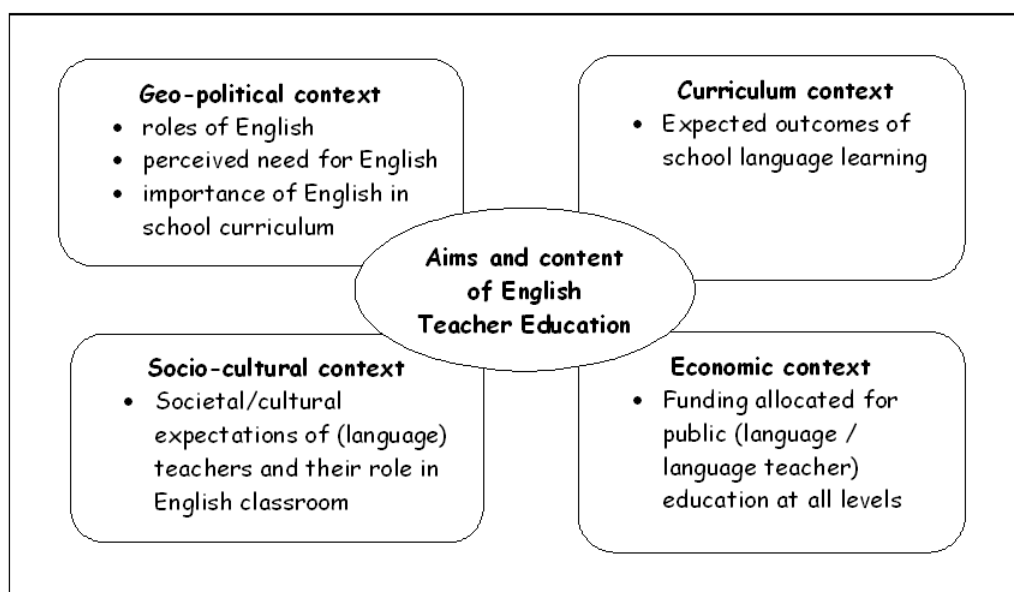
- Knowledge about what language is, what 'communicative competence' involves and what can and cannot be taught.
- Knowledge about language learning processes and how these vary according to age of learners.

- An understanding of what such knowledge implies for the approach to teaching and learning
- A range of techniques for teaching different aspects of language forms and skills required by the curriculum
- An understanding of how to evaluate learning materials and techniques for adapting them to their own context in ways that support the achievement of curriculum outcomes.
- An understanding about methods of assessment
- Adequate English language proficiency to cope with all above and below
- Opportunities (to cooperate with others) to try out all of the above in more or less realistic situations
- Opportunities to discuss the outcomes of practice with colleagues and tutors and to retry the same thing in different ways.
- Recognition of the fact that there is no 'blueprint' that will work in all situations with all learners
- The realisation that their ITE is just the first step in their learning about teaching process

In section 4, I offer a possible way of incorporating the above into a 'whole'. However we need to remember that each curriculum context is different, and so appropriate ITE curricula will be different too.

TESOL ITE in Context

As noted in the introduction to this paper, any English teacher ITE system is situated within a wider national macro context. Within this it is situated within a national education system. The macro context within which English ITE is situated will vary. Figure 1 suggests some of the main inter-related variables.

Figure 1. The macro context of TESOL initial teacher training

Ultimately, the format and content of the English curriculum and any language teacher ITE based upon it will depend on the geo-political and socio-cultural context of each country. It is this which will determine policy decisions regarding the provision of English teaching in schools, the funding provided to support it, the goals of such teaching, the form it is expected to take and the weighting of English within the school curriculum as a whole.

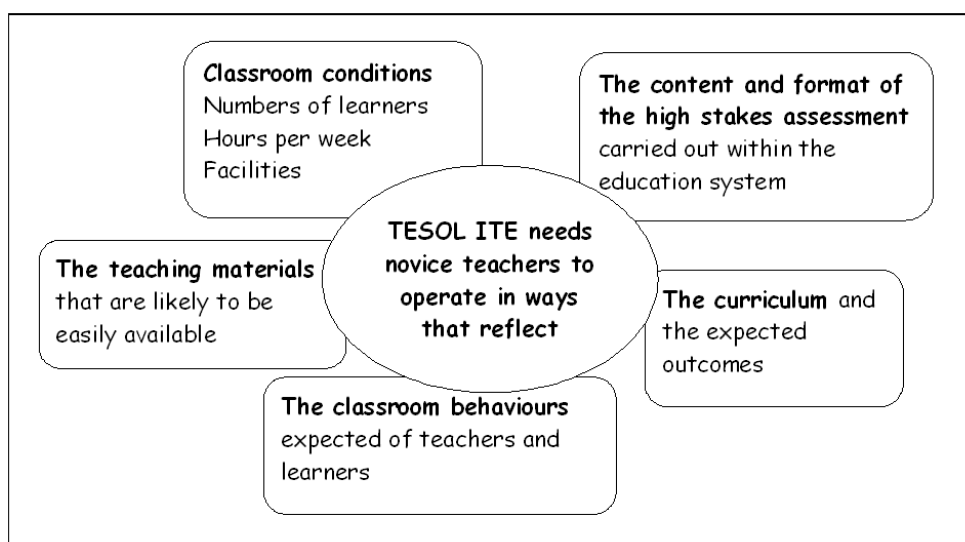
Despite the wide variation in some or all the above contextual factors between countries, it seems that nowadays in most countries the principles underlying the English curriculum are expressed in terms of communicative language teaching and/or task based learning and/or learner centred approaches. Similarly curriculum outcomes are expressed in terms of the development of learners' communicative abilities.

This language of curriculum principles and outcomes derives from research into the nature of language and the language learning process and hence the techniques and activities best fitted to support language teaching. This research has been mostly carried out in what Holliday (1994) calls BANA (British, Australasia, North America) countries and has been imported relatively unadapted from them. In such countries learners' goals for learning English tend to be instrumentally defined and the conditions for learning in

terms of class size, facilities and the English language environment outside the classroom are supportive. These conditions are dramatically different from those existing in the majority of English classrooms in countries' state education systems.

Given the conditions in many English classrooms and macro-contextual differences between countries as outlined in Figure 1, it is not reasonable to behave as if achieving goals commonly cited in curriculum documents, such as *communicative approach*, *empowering learners* and *fostering communicative abilities* is possible just by using a single set of contextually-universal techniques. If, therefore, we wish to use such terms to define curriculum aims, actually implementing the curriculum in any particular context will involve adapting 'communicative ideas' to take the reality of the national English language teaching context into account. This reality will also need to be reflected in English teacher ITE programmes. The main components of any such English language teaching system, adapted from Wedell (2003), are illustrated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. The core components of the ELT context within any education system



A possible core TESOL ITE curriculum

Since both wider and classroom contexts vary between and within national education systems, despite the shared ‘communicative rhetoric’ of curriculum documents no universally appropriate English ITE curriculum can exist. However, if a national curriculum expects school learners to leave school with a degree of ‘communicative competence’, and if we believe that the growing body of research into teacher learning has useful things to tell us, then any English ITE curriculum that tries to prepare trainees to help learners develop such competence is likely to need to include the following sets of knowledge and abilities.

Table 3: Core features of a TESOL ITE curriculum that tries to prepare trainees to meet ‘communicative’ national curriculum goals.

Knowledge about		Ability to	
The (English) Language System	The Language learning Process	USE the language	TEACH the language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Components • Purposes • Frequencies/ Corpora • What has and has not been described? • What can and cannot be directly taught? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we know about it? • What conditions seem to help/hinder it? • How do these vary at different ages? • What do these imply for the roles teachers and learners in language classrooms? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Oral/Aural/ Reading skills development based around topics in L2 culture • Oral/Written Language of English Teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of forms - Instructions - Management of skills/use activities • Language of ELT Reading based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying knowledge of language, learning, principles of agreed teaching approach, and suggested techniques in practice through Microteaching /Observation forms and skills based activities trying out, feedback , re-teaching cycles, moving from group to individual responsibility • Applying materials evaluation and adaptation principles, and microteaching adapted materials • Applying principles of assessment design to particular forms and skills and trying these out.
The Curriculum and the classroom Given expected curriculum outcomes, and what we know about language and learning how might available classroom time be divided up?			
Teaching methodology Given what we know about language and learning and what the curriculum hopes to achieve, what principles do we want to ensure in our approach to teaching, what techniques may be helpful for teaching forms and skills/uses in motivating ways?			
		All the above more/less embedded	

Materials Evaluation and adaptation - Bearing expected curriculum outcomes in mind, what are strengths and weaknesses of existing materials? - How can we use existing materials to support the approach/ techniques? - What principles can we use for adapting materials/ finding supplementary materials?		in school based teaching practice.
Language Assessment - What are the principles of any assessment? - Why do we assess? - How can we vary assessment methods according to assessment purposes? - How do the high stakes regional/national exams assess learners? - How can we assess in ways that will encourage and not demotivate?		

Table 3 is an attempt to bring together components likely to be needed if an English ITE programme aims to develop teachers who can feel fairly confident about helping their learners to achieve typically ‘communicative’ curriculum goals. However the above components of the ITE curriculum are adapted to meet national needs and contextual realities, the literature about language, language learning and the teacher learning process suggests that the following principles will be relevant.

- Maximise programme coherence by demonstrating to trainees how what we ‘know’ affects what we ‘do’. For example, knowledge of the education system, the teaching hours available, the curriculum goals and the examination system can help us consider how we use the classroom time we have; Knowledge of how language works and what seems to help language learning can help identify principles for a teaching approach; understanding of a teaching approach can help us to develop principles for adapting materials and developing assessment formats.
- Provide maximum opportunities for ‘trying out’, thinking and retrying. Time-consuming, but in my opinion very worthwhile.

- Encourage trainees to cooperate and learn from each other's attempts to implement approaches and their activities.
- Develop trainees' oral and written language proficiency in three critical areas, general, classroom and professional.
- Provide some cultural input via the proficiency development.
- Support the specific proficiency inputs with numerous demands to use the language for study, microteaching, materials adaptation and discussion purposes.
- Provide some training in practitioner research and an expectation that this will be an ongoing part of trainees' professional development.

Support after ITE

Novice English teachers emerging from even the most ideal ITE programme will have a shock as they move into the world of full time teaching in what will usually be an unfamiliar school environment. They will often encounter a lack of coherence between components of the ELT context, which may affect learners' motivation, the ease with which particular teaching-learning techniques can be introduced, and/or the attitudes of older colleagues, school administrators and parents.

The more they can be supported for their first few years of teaching, the more likely they are to be willing and able to try to be the best teachers they can be, even in less than ideal circumstances. Establishing novice teacher post-training support mechanisms is thus a further integral aspect of any attempt to better support the achievement of curriculum aims through changes to language teacher education provision. Examples of how this might be done include

- your own development of Teachers' Clubs here in Maharashtra and further
- the formation of teacher and head teacher groups in Indonesia (Coleman et al 2004),

- the introduction of school based mentors with responsibilities for novice teachers in eastern and central Europe (Malderez and Bodozcky 1999),
- the new teacher support groups in the USA reported by De Wert (2003), in which cohorts of trainees who have been through training together meet regularly either face to face or online, to help reduce stress, decrease isolation and increase feelings of competence and so enthusiasm.

However, whatever form it takes, if such support is to be genuinely effective it needs to be taken seriously, (Leithwood 2002, Harris 2003, Harvey 1996, Fullan 2000). It needs to be supported by local educational administrators and school principals and be regarded as part of normal professional activity in terms of being timetabled and properly funded.

Conclusion

Data from many English teaching contexts around the world suggests that English language curriculum goals are not being met in language classrooms. One reason for this is that initial teacher education programmes for English teachers are not designed to train teachers in the understandings and skills that are needed to help classroom learners achieve ‘communicative’ curriculum aims. Although no single blueprint can be applied to the varied contexts within which English is learned, the areas of agreement about the nature of language and the language learning processes and what these imply for teaching in language classrooms, together with what we know about how teachers learn, do suggest certain principles to inform development of locally appropriate ITE programmes.

Rethinking English ITE programmes takes sustained work over time spans of five years or longer. For educational planning to be consistent over such periods, requires a significant change in politicians’ and policy makers’ beliefs and behaviours, since such consistency requires educational change [...] to be seen *as a state not a government issue, with the provision of economic and political support over time* (Cox and Le Maitre 1999,) and for ‘governments

[to] put educational investment beyond their own need for political survival' (Fullan 2001:233).

Such political changes would be momentous if fully adopted. However, even where education remains 'political' in many dimensions, '*educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that*' (Fullan 2001:115). Ultimately therefore, if governments want the general public to feel that school based English language teaching provides what the curriculum claims and so is of value to learners, they must offer English ITE that prepares teachers accordingly.

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