



# II Fórum de Língua Inglesa

Elaboração e Implementação de Currículos



**Curriculum Development in an era  
Of Educational Reform**  
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# Educational Reform

- Looking for solutions to complex problems that are both social & educational in nature.
- Policy-makers are often unfamiliar with the educational reality. Policies are pushed down, and are supposed to effect classrooms.
- Educational contexts are complex: Many players
  - Administrators: Content knowledge?
  - Curriculum specialists: Familiarity with context?
  - Assessment specialists: Narrow expertise
  - Teachers: What generation? What is their philosophy?
  - Students: Socioeconomic background; familiarity with schooling
  - Their families: Socioeconomic background; funds of knowledge
- Teacher Educators: Philosophy? How do they see teaching and learning? Familiarity with the new reforms?



## Outline for today's presentation

- What is curriculum?
- Some international examples of curricular problems
  - In Ecuador
  - In Mexico
  - In the U.S
- Backward Planning/ Understanding by Design

# What is Curriculum?

- Various definitions across time and specialties

Dewey, 1902: Curriculum is the continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies...

Tyler, 1957: [The curriculum is] all the learning experiences planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals, (p.79)

2016: The curriculum is the plans made for guiding learning in the schools, usually represented in retrievable documents of several levels of generality, and the actualization of those plans in the classroom, as experienced by the learners and as recorded by an observer; those experiences take place in a learning environment that also influences what is learned ( Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead & Boschee,2016) .



## As curriculum developers we must consider:

- The goal: Why is this study important?
- The evaluation: To what extent, and how measured?
- The program of studies: The what?
- The scope: How broad or narrow?
- The sequence: The when?
- The tasks and activities: How is this best learned, given students' needs?
- The students' experiences: What did I know already? What did I experience?
- The families' experiences/ expectations.



# Some Real-life Examples

- Sharing these cases as common errors made in the world of curriculum development and language teaching.
- All three have followed a top-down approach.
- All three have faced serious challenges.
- All three have unintended consequences for students, their families and teachers.

# El Ecuador

- University X
- Contact made through LAPE office
- Need for an evaluation of their English program
- A colleague spent 3 months observing, interviewing and working with instructors and administrators in the English program and across University.
- At University level: New Policy– all graduates will graduate with a B2 level of English.
- Why this new policy? So that more Ecuadoreans could go abroad to do graduate work in international settings.



# What was the reality?

- Students came to University with minimal English  
many came from rural high schools whose teachers did not speak English
- The large number of students needing English: not enough instructors
- Students' schedules did not allow for a complete course of English
- The curriculum based on a book series that sought to develop oral communication in students.
- This curriculum promised B2 levels of English after 12 units of study—  
four years of study.
- Most students required to take only 2 years of English study.
- Most students did not see need for English.

# Challenges:

- Decision at national and university level without knowing the reality of students, teachers, and chosen “curriculum”.
- University implementation with little to no understanding of how language is learned.
- Top-down approach which pressed on each descending level.
  - National to University administrators
  - University administrators to Program administrators
  - Program administrators to instructors
  - Instructors to students
- Investment in a published curriculum whose goals were at odds with University goals
- Students unable to reach B2 levels of English.
- Blame placed on English program.

# Mexico

- Through LAPE, work with regional technical universities
- In engineering and other technical careers, English required to read manuals, and to communicate with home offices.
- Regional universities decide that all graduates must pass the TOEFL with at least 500 pts.
- English classes focus on general communicative goals.
- No coherent curriculum. Some English instructors use English series, most do not.
- English language lab work based on the series.
- English instructors are very part-time. Must work in multiple sites to earn a living.

# Challenges

- Difficult to make any changes at classroom level, because of English instructors' employment status– little commitment.
- The need students had was for an English for Specific Purposes curriculum.
- English instructors had no knowledge of the technical fields of study.
- Misuse of TOEFL--- its' purpose is to predict success in study in English-speaking universities.
- Constant change in administrators

# The U.S.

- Bigger and more complex situation.
- Educational reform for whole country, developed by governors, state school officers & others around English Language Arts & Math.
- Developed Standards of what every student should know and be able to do upon High School graduation, and then worked out standards for each grade level.
- Up to each state to decide to adopt the standards.
- Up to each state to decide how to help districts implement
- Up to districts to decide how to help teachers understand them.
- No consideration of the large numbers of English Learners in the U.S. – in some school districts up to 45% or more.
- Most published materials in both of these content areas were aligned to No Child Left Behind that required a scripted curriculum where reading and math were taught as discrete skills.

# Challenges

Many teacher educators and families opposed to this reform

No teachers prepared to work with this idea of curriculum– most at a loss.

Many publishing companies retain same curriculum and only add cosmetic changes.

Development and implementation of national exams based on CCSS with dismal outcomes.

Work with some curricula developers who are concerned with English Learners

Not enough experts to help all in need.

Basic question: Can a curriculum work to help students and to retrain teachers at the same time?



# Backwards Planning or Understanding by Design

- The current thinking on Curriculum Planning is to plan backwards....

## Step One:

- Rather than start with the question of what should be taught, one should start with the goal: Why are we teaching this language and what do we want to achieve?
- In the case of Ecuador, it would have been to develop an intermediate level of English so students could study more academic levels of English for study abroad.
- For Mexico it could be to acquire English for Engineering so that graduates can read engineering material and communicate with the home offices of engineering firms.
- For the U.S., they did start with the goal– developing the knowledge and abilities students should have at the end of high school that prepares them for college or career readiness.

## Step 2: Study and/or Develop Standards

- Ecuador would have to develop some standards: guidelines for the study of English, Maybe something like :
  - Understands and can use written information to supplement class materials.
- Mexico could develop standards around English for Engineering like:
  - Understands and can follow instructions in manuals when troubleshooting.
- Here is an example of one of the U.S. Common Core Standards:  
Integration of knowledge and ideas:
  - Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Curriculum Developers, administrators and teachers need to know the Standards they are being held accountable to, and understand what they mean for their respective roles.

## Step Three:

### **Develop Assessments that clearly measure students' abilities to achieve the Standard(s)**

- If in Ecuador the Standard is: Understands and can use written information to supplement class materials, then the assessment must require that the student actually can do that.
- If in Mexico the Standard is: Understands and can follow instructions in manuals when troubleshooting, then the assessment has to require a troubleshooting activity.
- In the U.S., two private companies developed the exams based on the Common Core Standards. The problem is that the assessment experts were left in charge, with little to no involvement of others.

## Step Four

### **Design the content and the activities that will lead and allow students to achieve the Standard.**

- This is often where critical mistakes are made: purchase of a published series that becomes the de facto curriculum.
- The role of teachers: If teachers are to implement the new reform, they must be brought in and be given time to understand the new Standards, and how this impacts their teaching.
- And for teachers to be brought in, administrators must also understand what the new Standards mean for their role as supervisors of teachers.
- And finally, students and their parents need to understand the new expectations, how this will impact their work in the classroom and the ways in which their evaluations will change.
- Parents need to understand how this new reform will better assist their children to achieve academically and socially.

# Curriculum experts, suggest:

## That the process should be both top-down and bottom-up

- As policy makers and high-level administrators make new policies,
- Curriculum specialists, lower-level administrators, evaluation experts and teachers must be involved so that they can understand and have the skills to implement.
- The mistake in the U.S. context has been there has been no consistent and well-planned bottom-up process. For this reason lower level administrators, teachers, parents and students have pushed back on this reform.
- Few if any publishing houses have produced materials that truly reflect the new Standards.
- There is now a very small movement dedicated to the needs of English Learners, but, for now, English Learner are once again being left-out.

# For you in Brazil

You have a wonderful opportunity to do things better! My suggestions are:

- 1) Learn from the mistakes I have outlined in this presentation.
- 1) Study the new Foreign Language Standards, and make sure this includes curriculum developers, evaluation experts, lower level administrators and teachers.
- 3) Set your long-term, intermediate and short-term goals for foreign language study.
- 4) Develop/design the end of course assessments that reflect the new Standards.
- 5) With teachers develop/design the end of unit study assessments.





## My suggestions continued:

6) With teachers develop the content and activities that will lead students to achieve the new Standards.

7) Involve students and their parents so that they understand and support the new Standards, and curriculum.

Obrigada! Thank you! ¡Gracias!

Questions?

Comments?

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