

College of Education for Humanities
English Department



M. A. Studies/ Methodology

(First Course) 2023-2024

Methods of Teaching

“Negotiated Syllabuses”

Asst.Prof. Najwa Yaseen Ismail (Ph.D)

INTRODUCTION

The so-called ‘communicative’ era of language teaching has seen enormous development in the area of syllabus design. The present paper considers the characteristics of a radical syllabus type known as the Process or Negotiated syllabus. This type, based on designs proposed much earlier in the field of general education, takes the basic principles of communicative language teaching to their logical conclusion. The Negotiated model is totally different from other syllabuses in that it allows full learner participation in selection of content, mode of working, route of working, assessment, and so on. It should by this means embody the central principle that the learner's needs are of paramount importance. The present contention is that the strong version of the negotiated model, involving full learner participation, would for all practical purposes be unworkable in any other circumstances than with a very small group or in a one-to-one situation. Both learners and teachers would have considerable difficulty in operating such an extreme negotiated model. However, the concept of negotiation is an extremely valuable one and it is therefore here proposed that, rather than rejecting negotiation entirely, negotiated element might be built into each component of a syllabus. In this way, learners might be allowed a degree of choice and self-expression, unavailable in most existing syllabus types.

-What Is Negotiated Syllabus

Negotiated syllabuses, also called process syllabuses (Breen, 1987), are organized around the shared decisions made by teachers and learners at various stages of a course. The shared decisions are the sign of mutual understanding of the two parties on how to run the class and cover the materials based on learners’ needs. In fact, such a syllabus uncovers “a shared detailed understanding between teacher and students of what is going on, what needs to be done, and how it will be done” (Boomer, 1992, p. 287).

A negotiated syllabus involves the teacher and the learners working together to make decisions at many of the parts of the curriculum design process. It is a way of giving high priority to the recognition of learner needs within a course and to the need to continually adjust courses while they are running to suit changing needs and circumstances. Negotiated syllabuses are also called “process syllabuses”

(Breen, 1987). The word process in the term process syllabus indicates that the important feature of this type of syllabus is that it focuses on how the syllabus is made rather than what should be in it.

Clarke (1991:13-32) sees the interest in negotiated syllabuses arising from humanistic methodologies like community language learning which are very learner-centred, from needs analysis which focuses on learners' needs, from work in individualization and learner autonomy, and from learner strategy research which sees the learner playing a central role in determining how the language is learned.

-Origin of Negotiated Syllabus

Negotiated syllabus which emphasizes on the key role of language learners and the concepts of shared decision-making and negotiation is a social and problem-solving model of syllabus design with philosophical origins rooted in individualism and progressivism and psychological origins in humanism and constructivism Breen and Littlejohn (2000a:5-39).It is based on general philosophical and educational principles and its foundations are comprehensively expressed by scholars such as Breen and Littlejohn determine four significant applied linguistics and educational principles as the basis of negotiated syllabus that converge in shaping it. They consist of humanistic methodologies such as community language learning that is basically learner-centered, needs analysis particularly for specific purposes, individualization and learner autonomy, and research on learner strategies in language learning. All of these concepts derive from a holistic approach and emphasize on the central role of language learners in the learning process in which their affective, cognitive, and linguistic needs are taken into consideration. In fact, the theoretical underpinnings of a learner-centered view are provided by constructivism which underscores the idea that learners are the agent of creating their own knowledge on the basis of their previous experience and social interactions. Similarly, Piaget considers action and self-directed problem-solving to be at the core of learning and learner development.

-The Reason behind Negotiated syllabus

These are clearly strong reasons for having a negotiated syllabus. Breen and Littlejohn (2000b: 272) list situations where a negotiated syllabus is almost unavoidable:

- 1- Where the teacher and students have different backgrounds.
- 2- Where time is short and the most useful choices must be made.
- 3- Where there is a very diverse group of students and there is a need to find common ground.
- 4-Where initial needs analysis is not possible.
- 5-Where there is no course book. 6 Where the students' past experiences must be part of the course. 7 Where the course is open-ended and exploratory.

-The steps of negotiated syllabus

Breen and Littlejohn (2000b: 30–31) see the range of decisions open to negotiation as including all the parts of the central circle of the curriculum design diagram, namely goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation, and monitoring and assessment.

Purposes: Why are we learning the language? (Goals)

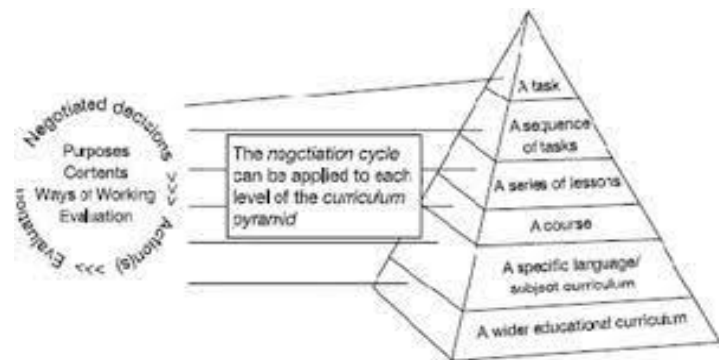
Content: What should be the focus of our work? (Content and sequencing)

Ways of working: How should the learning work be carried out? (Format and presentation)

Evaluation: How well has the learning proceeded? (Monitoring and assessment)

Breen and Littlejohn (2000b: 34–38) point out that negotiation of the goals, content, presentation or assessment of the syllabus can occur at any level of detail or generality from negotiating a particular task in the course, to a sequence of tasks, a series of lessons, the whole course, or the wider curriculum (Figure 10.1).

A negotiated syllabus involves the steps of
(1) negotiating the goals, content, format and assessment of the



course,

(2) implementing these negotiated decisions,

(3) evaluating the effect of the implementation in terms of outcomes and the way the implementation was done. This then should lead to a return to step (1).

The higher levels of the pyramid are included in the ones below, so when decisions are made, there can be a connection between the different levels of the pyramid. Moreover, at each specific level decisions about the purpose, content, ways of working, and evaluation can be made. Task is the smallest unit and the most immediate location of learning work while educational curriculum is the most immediate location of learning work while educational curriculum is the broadest at the institution or state level. In fact, the levels are not totally distinct and each level overlaps to some extent with the ones above or below it.

Negotiation and process are two terms used in three different senses. In one sense, they are discussed in the process of SLA and the way interaction may contribute to it, in one other sense they are related to classroom pedagogy and deal with the stages students go through in producing language, and in the third sense they correlate with concepts such as shared decision-making and autonomy, learner-centeredness and collaborative learning (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a).