2 Rethinking the College English Curriculum in China

Wen Zhao
(Northeastern University, China)
David Coniam
(The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR)

INTRODUCTION

English language education in the 21st century in mainland China has been marked with a series of educational reforms and curriculum development in answer to the posing challenges of social, economic and personal development. Some encouraging attempts have been made in studying the curriculum development and syllabus design across primary, secondary and tertiary levels in recent years. The book *Foreign Language Curriculum and Teaching* by Lianghuan Lu (2003) illustrated primary and secondary English curriculums, and the relationship between curriculum development and teaching. Another book *College English Teaching: Retrospection, Reflection and Research* by Jigang Cai (2006) provided some detained information on College English curriculum at the tertiary level. A third book *Foreign Language Education Outline* by Baimei Su (2005) presented some brief description on syllabus design. A more comprehensive description of foreign language education and language policy at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in China was a paper article by Qiufang Wen and Wenzhong Hu (2007). The chapter will mainly focus on College English (CE) education at tertiary level.

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

The two terms *curriculum* and *syllabus* are commonly used, though they themselves are of a confusing nature. They are often misused and have caused some confusion and misunderstanding. It is therefore essential to clarify the two concepts before our discussion of curriculum development and syllabus design.

Definitions of Curriculum: A Land of Sound, Fury and Confusion

Etymologically, the word *curriculum* originates from Latin, which, "according to Cassell's Latin-English Dictionary, refers variously to running, a race course, and a chariot" (Jackson, 1992, p. 5). Literally, the definitions given in the dictionaries are of quite narrow senses. For example, the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/GLOBAL.html) defines curriculum as "the subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003); *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org) defines curriculum as 'a course of academic studies,' (Gove & Merriam-Webster, 2002) with the first recorded date of curriculum being 1824.

Like the Six Blind Men and an Elephant in the ancient Indian story, each blind man touched a different part of the elephant in an attempt to grasp the concept of 'what an elephant is' (Schubert, 1986). The field of curriculum has long been considered a land full of sound and fury, full of 'conflict' and 'confusion' (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Jackson, 1992; Taba, 1962), and full of 'chaotic state of curriculum terminology' (Kliebard, 1975) as well as 'ill-defined epistemology' (Goodlad, 1985).

Schubert (1986) uses the terms image and characterization to denote a broader conceptualization as "more than eleven hundred curriculum books have been written in the present century" (p. 26). The term curriculum has been used by educational practitioners, theorists and researchers in various ways, with no universally accepted definition. The definitions currently used can be extracted into the following categories (Parkay & Stanfor, 1998; Walker, 1990).

> A course of study; derived from the Latin *currere*, meaning to run a course
> Subject matter; the information or knowledge that students are to learn
> Intended learning outcomes; the results of instruction as distinct from the means of instruction
> The experiences, both planned and unplanned, that enhance (and sometimes impede) the education and growth of students (Walker, 1990, p. 5)

Definitions within each of the categories all view curriculum from a one-sided perspective, which results in losing the whole image of the elephant. In the current study, a more eclectic and comprehensive definition of curriculum is adopted, which defines curriculum as "all of the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is

planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice" (Hass & Parkay, 2000, p. 3). This comprehensive definition enables us to view curriculum holistically and not in piecemeal.

Concurrent Curriculums

According to Posner (2004), there are generally five levels of coexisting curriculums, as shown below.

> Official curriculum: The curriculum described in formal documents.
> Operational curriculum: The curriculum embodied in actual teaching practices and tests.
> Hidden curriculum: Institutional norms and values not openly acknowledged by teachers or school officials.
> Null curriculum: The subject matters not taught.
> Extra curriculum: The planned experiences outside the formal curriculum. (pp. 13-14)

The five concurrent curriculums contribute significantly to the field of curriculum study (Walker, 1990). The *CECR* (*College English Curriculum Requirements*), which is to be examined in the chapter, is an ideal type of official curriculum serving as a national guideline for CE teaching and learning.

Definitions of Syllabus: A Territory of Perplexity and Confusion

As with the confusing conceptions of *curriculum*, "the concept of a language syllabus has been fundamental in the development of language teaching practices in the twentieth century" (Richards, 1990, p. 8). The field of syllabuses is also full of perplexity and confusion, as can be seen from the definitions listed below.

> A statement of content, sequence, and (often) recommended teaching techniques. (Strevens, 1977, p. 61)
> A syllabus is a particular scheme fashioned for a particular content area. A syllabus, then, defines a subject. (Widdowson, 1984, p. 23)
> A syllabus must be seen as making explicit what will be taught, not what will be learned. (Yalden, 1984, p. 15)
> A syllabus is a more circumscribed document, usually one which has been prepared for a particular group of learners. In some places, the terms

> *syllabus* and *course outline* means the same thing, although recently the term *syllabus* has taken on a special meaning concerning the specification of language content alone. (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p. 3)
>
> Syllabus … focuses more narrowly on the selection and grading of content. (Nunan, 1988, p. 8)
>
> Ways of organizing courses and materials. (Brown, 1995, p. 14)
>
> A specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested. (Richards, 2001, p. 2)

The major aspect that all these definitions attempt to take account of is the subject matter, the selection and organization of the content area. A syllabus hence shares the problems of education in general. It is linked to time, specifies some kind of sequence of events and learning content, and is related to the study of the nature of language, language acquisition, second language learning, and language use, as is summarized by Brumfit (1984).

Curriculum and Syllabus

As the two terms *curriculum* and *syllabus* are sometimes used interchangeably, it is, therefore, important to classify them before conducting some further discussion.

In terms of the breadth of the definition, *curriculum* is sometimes used in a narrow sense, and refers to the same concept as the term *syllabus*. According to Stern (1984), the two terms in the UK refer to the same concept. "In North America, the terms 'course of study,' 'curriculum,' or 'program' often cover more or less the same ground. Three aspects of a curriculum/syllabus are usually under discussion: its objectives, the content, and the sequential arrangements" (p. 5).

While *syllabuses* can be used in a broad sense, which make them equivalent with *curriculum* (Candlin, 1984), the two terms can be viewed as having the same connotation in a narrow sense, embodying the "part of the language which is to be taught, broken down into 'items' or otherwise processed for teaching purposes" (Strevens, 1977, p. 25).

Some researchers consider that there is a need to classify the two terms in terms of their scope. "It is usually assumed that curriculum includes syllabus, but not vice versa" (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p. 3). "A syllabus is more specific and more concrete than a curriculum, and a curriculum may contain a number of syllabuses. A curriculum may specify only the goals, while the syllabus specifies the content of the lessons used to move the learners toward the goals" (Krahnke, 1987, p. 2). Furthermore, curriculum

is concerned with what can and should be taught to whom, when, and how (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Stern, 1984). In mainland China, *syllabus* used to be used in a broad sense as official curriculum. The concept of curriculum gradually came to be adopted since the turn of the 21st century accompanying educational reform at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

CURRICULUM MODELS AND SYLLABUS TYPES

In the field of curriculum study, various curriculum models have been proposed and testified in the actual teaching practice, and in the field of language education, different types of language syllabuses have also been proposed at different time and period of history. Even today, different curriculum models and syllabus types coexist and overlap with each other to cater the different learning needs.

Curriculum Models

Many different curriculum models have been proposed in the field of curriculum study (Mandel, 1980; Tanner & Tanner, 1995; Walker, 1990). White (1988), however, proposed three models in language curriculum development: the means-ends model, the process approach model and the situational model.

Model 1 Means-Ends Model

The means-ends model is a rational-planning model, which is associated firstly with the four fundamental questions in Tyler's (1949) rationale, and secondly with Taba's (1962) elaborated model concerning curriculum development. Figure 1 represents an adapted Tyler-Taba curriculum development model, which White (1988) uses to illustrate the top-down product-based curriculum development. As is shown in Figure 1, this model is based on instrumental rationality, which shows a clear tendency to knowledge transmission. The statement of goals and objectives plays a key role in this model, and it is usually adopted for official and formal curriculum making with clearly stated goals and objectives.

Model 2 The Process Approach Model

The process approach model (White, 1988) represents the operational curriculum in actual classroom practice by teachers (see Figure 2). In this model, aims and purposes are defined first. Content, and learning

experiences and evaluation then follow in the dynamic process. The model starts from teachers' actual practice with regard to sequence, time and methods, and the practical concerns and the practical rationality are the key concerns of the process curriculum model. This model is, therefore, a type of operational curriculum of the five concurrent curriculums, and can be seen to be progressive and open-ended.

FIGURE 1
A Revised Taba-Tyler Curriculum Development Model (White, 1988, p. 26)

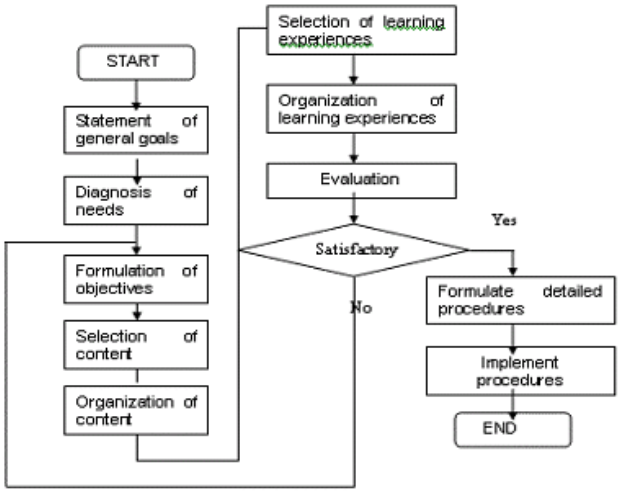
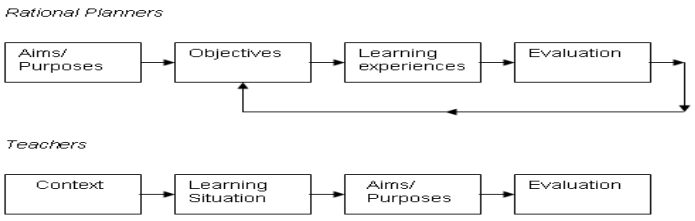


FIGURE 2
A Process Approach Model (White, 1988, p. 33)

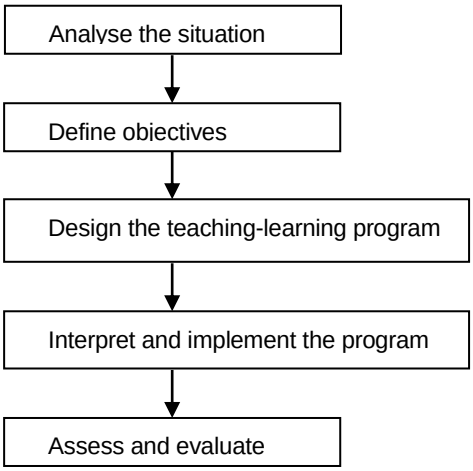


Model 3 The Situational Model

The situational model, proposed by Skilbeck (1984) is in essence a school-based curriculum development model, taking the actual school

context as the starting point (see Figure 3). The situational framework consequently embraces the previous two models (the means-ends model and the process approach model), the official curriculum document and the operational curriculum in specific school contexts. The rationality behind this model is *praxis*, *dialogue* and *emancipation* (Pinar, 1975, 1995), with the driving force of this curriculum design being internal incentive rather than top-down imposition.

FIGURE 3
Skilbeck's Situational Model (Skilbeck, 1984, p. 231)



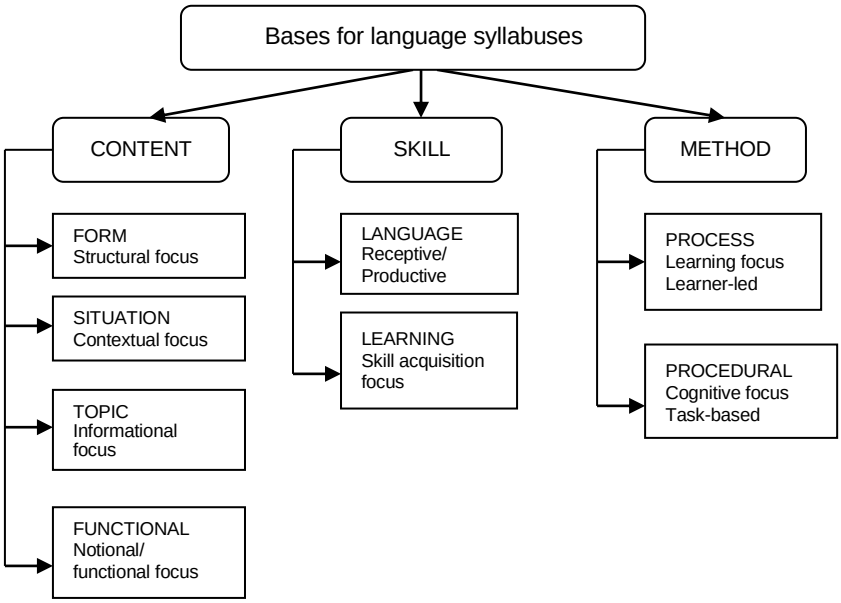
The three types of model discussed above show the different ways of curriculum development from a means-ends objective-based model through a conceptual-empirical approach, to placing curriculum development in the actual school context and in the hands of teachers. The development of a national curriculum tends to be a means-ends model while the operational curriculum and the school-based curriculum are associated with a process approach and a situational model.

Types of Syllabuses

The categorization of syllabuses – the selection and organization of contents – varies from one researcher to another, though there is a degree of overlap. Allen (1984) proposed a three-component curriculum: structural, functional, and experiential. Mackay (1978) proposes three major types of

syllabuses: structural, situational, and notional. On the basis of Mackay's three syllabuses, Brown (2001) proposes seven types of syllabus: structural, situational, topical, functional, notional, skills and task. Krahnke (1987) proposed six types of syllabuses: structural, notional/functional, situational, skill-based, task-based and content-based, ranging from emphasis on form to emphasis on meaning. Richards (2001) proposes ten types of syllabuses: grammatical or structural syllabus, lexical syllabus, functional syllabus, situational syllabus, topical or content-based syllabus, competency-based syllabus, skills syllabus, task-based syllabus, text-based syllabus, and an integrated syllabus. White (1988), on the other hand, proposes a more concise and clear classification framework (see Figure 4), which succinctly classifies all language syllabus design into two types: Type A and B.

FIGURE 4
Types of Syllabuses (White, 1988, p. 46)



Type A, the content-based syllabus, concerns "*What* is to be learnt?"; Type B, the process-based syllabuses, concerns "*How* is it to be learnt?" Each type covers some subcategories. Four types of syllabuses can be placed under Type A: the linguistic form-focused structural syllabus, the

context-focused situational syllabus, information-focused syllabus, and semantic-focused notional/functional syllabus. Type B has two syllabuses under it: the learning-focused and learner-led process syllabus, and the cognitive-focused task-based procedural syllabus. In between the two types are skill-based syllabuses, which cover two kinds of syllabuses. The skill-type syllabus is based on the receptive skills – listening and reading and productive skills – speaking and writing; the skill-acquisition focus syllabus focuses on organizing the various skills in a graded sequence. Syllabus design in mainland China is a gradual change from content-based syllabuses to skill- and process-based syllabuses, which is reflected in the historical development of CE.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN MAINLAND CHINA

Although English has become an international lingual franca, CE education and curriculum development in mainland China witnessed a somewhat different trend due to the social and political impact. The term *College English* (CE) is a specialized term in mainland China, addressing the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level. CE teaching and curriculum development in mainland China since 1949 (the founding of the People's Republic of China) can be roughly divided into four periods:

the period before the Cultural Revolution;
the period during the Cultural Revolution;
the period after the downfall of the 'Gang of Four'; and
the period of full development.

These different stages will then be elaborated upon to put the present CE reform in mainland China into perspective. The term *syllabus* in this section is used in a broad sense, referring to the *curriculum* as official curriculum.

Period I Before the Cultural Revolution (1949-1966)

China's present higher education system was created in the early 1950s with the goal of training high-level personnel according to perceived

manpower needs in line with the central plan. Between 1949 and 1959, higher education expanded sixfold in order to meet the skill requirements for industrialization, agricultural modernization, and political mobilization (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997, pp. 1-2). During the 1950s, the relationship between the former USSR and the newly-established China was quite friendly and close, with the USSR exerting a strong dominating influence on ideology, politics, economy and education. The Russian modes of teaching were widely adopted in education, and even in language syllabus design, with the form-based structural syllabus. The corresponding teaching approach in language teaching was the Grammar-Translation (GT) method. "By 1954 English as a foundation subject had been removed from the syllabuses in the secondary education sector, and thus Russian became the most widely taught foreign language in China" (Yao, 1993, p. 74).

The breakdown of Sino-Soviet friendships made Russian lose its popularity, and English suddenly came back to prominence. To meet the urgent need of a serious teacher shortage, the most dominating teaching method after the fading Russian influence was the Direct Method (DM), using the target language to teach the language through imitating and practicing. The Audiolingual Method (ALM) marked its turning point during this period, with aural activity being emphasized and pronunciation being stressed.

In an effort to improve teaching quality and standards, "the Chinese Education Commission (now the Ministry of Education) began to recruit teachers from abroad for higher education. The first group of British teachers came to China in the early 1960s" (Yao, 1993, p. 74). The period witnessed a steady improvement in English language teaching. In 1962, the first *College English Teaching Syllabus* was issued, which prescribed that "College English is a practical subject … The teaching hours should be no less than 240 hours … Students should master at least 1,400 vocabulary items, and they should be able to read and translate scientific articles with the help of a dictionary … with a reading speed at 17 wpm" (Lu, 2003, p. 9). Unfortunately, due to the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, the syllabus was not implemented.

Period II During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

Initiated in 1966, the Cultural Revolution hampered language teaching in mainland China, in particular English language teaching. Anything associated with Western values was either banned or forbidden. "During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), enrollment was reduced to below 1949 levels,

examinations were abolished, and admission and graduation were based on political criteria. In short, teaching and research came to a halt" (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997, pp. 1-2). "Although English language teaching (ELT) programs in higher education resumed in 1968, there was little teaching/learning activity: tutors and their students were frequently sent to the countryside or factories to receive re-education from farmers and workers. Moreover, between 1966 and 1971, no new students were enrolled in higher education" (Yao, 1993, p. 74). It was not until 1971 that the worker-peasant-soldier students were first enrolled in higher education institutions, although there was a serious shortage of teaching materials, and even those available bore a strong political flavor.

Period III After the Downfall of the 'Gang of Four' (1977-1981)

After the fall of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976, economic reform was initiated in 1978. Higher education was rebuilt as a key element to modernize the country. The national university entrance examination was reinstituted in 1979 to establish a merit-based system, and enrollment was expanded. Faculty members were supported to upgrade their skills and academic qualifications through domestic or overseas training (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997).

"Since 1978, the Chinese Government has placed priority within the education sector upon rapid expansion and improvement of higher education to help reduce the serious human resource constraints on the country's economic and social development" (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997, p. xii). Foreign language teaching began to get back on track, and foreign language learning has since been a compulsory course for all non-English major freshmen and sophomores. In June 1980, the *College English Teaching Syllabus* (Draft) was jointly developed by Tsinghua University, Beijing University and other key universities in Shanghai, which in a sense was the first real syllabus of its kind. Compared with the 1962 syllabus, the 1980 syllabus only postulated grammatical teaching content without any glossary, as well as requirements for the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Although the syllabus was more advanced than the 1962 syllabus, its structure was in essence quite loose (Han, 1994, 1999).

Period IV Full Development of College English (1982-2000)

In 1982 the Ministry of Education (MOE) organized the *Teaching*

Syllabus Revised Team, and soon after its establishment a national survey of graduate students were investigated (Yang & Weir, 1998). In 1985, the document *Decision on Education Reform* was issued, "aiming at providing the integrated skills in a rapidly changing society to improve efficiency, quality and equity" (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997, p. xvi). In the same year, the *National Syllabus for Non-English Majors (For Engineering Students)* was issued, and in 1986, the *National Syllabus for Non-English Majors (For Arts and Science Students)* followed. With extensive investigation, surveys, and the joint cooperation of many universities, these two syllabuses were considered to be the most comprehensive syllabuses since the founding of the country (Fu, 1986). The common core and the most salient feature of these two syllabuses was level-based teaching. CE was divided into six different levels, among which courses within Levels 1-4 are compulsory, and courses of Levels 5-6 are optional (Ying, 1996). In 1987, College English Test (CET) Bands 4 & 6, a norm-referenced criterion-related exam, were established (Yang & Weir, 1998).

The main focus of the two syllabuses was on cultivating language skills, in particular reading skills, since China at that time was not in urgent need of people who could communicate in English competently. English was mainly used to get access to newly-introduced technology and materials. The syllabus required that all non-English major students reach a vocabulary stock of 4,000 words and be able to acquire some practical skills in English, such as filling in forms, writing business letters (MOE, 1985, p. 2). Due to this requirement, intensive and extensive reading courses became the key focus of language teaching at the majority of universities. Advanced level students were encouraged to sit the CET Band 6 after they had passed CET Band 4. The communicative language teaching approach began to be introduced into China in the 1980s, and has since been integrated into CE teaching in China.

In 1993, the document *Guidelines of China's Educational Reform and Development* was issued, advocating changes at two levels – governmental policy and institutional practice (*China: Higher education reform*, 1997, p. xvi). In 1994, a national conference was held in Daqing, a milestone in the history of CE teaching, discussing CE teaching in the new century (Cai, 2006).

In 1996, the MOE organized a project group *College English Teaching Content and Curriculum System Reform Study and Practice Team*. In the same year, Beijing University, Tsinghua University and six other universities were selected as eight experimental universities to conduct teaching reforms (MOE, 2000). In September 1999, *College English*

Teaching Syllabus (Trial Version) was issued soon after the proposal of *A Conceptual Framework of College English Curriculum Reform and Teaching Syllabus*. Soon after, a series of multimedia textbook-based teaching and learning software was developed, with more teachers better equipped with linguistic and applied linguistic theories. Though the changing trends are encouraging, gaps still exist between the social, practical needs and learners' self-development needs, and between linguistic knowledge and language use (Chen, 1997; Yang, 1998; Ying, 1996).

In 1999, after an extensive multi-level needs analysis of society, students and vocabulary stock – since vocabulary has always been considered a key factor in syllabus design – the MOE decided to revise the *College English Teaching Syllabuses*, to merge the two syllabuses, which greatly enhanced English teaching over the past twenty years, into one syllabus, which emphasized the common core of language on the basis of Krashen's (1985) SLA theory and Swain's (1984) output hypothesis (Shao, 1999). Among the four language skills, reading remained as the priority, although the goals of English teaching shifted from 'acquiring information' to 'exchanging information.' The most salient feature of the syllabus was the setting up of stratified requirements with the basic level of CE set as the minimum requirement making the new syllabus more elastic so that it might meet the different standards existing at different universities (Han, 1999; Shao, 1999).

Period V Steady Improvement and College English Reform (2000-the Present)

Since opening the door to the outside world, China's economy has been developing at a breakneck speed and in terms of enrollment higher education has been accelerating at a rate of 8% since 1999. In 2004, the number enrolling in higher education reached 20 million. It is expected that this number will reach 40 million (http://www.moe.edu.cn). The rapid expansion of higher education puts great pressure on CE teaching, and in particular the high demand of qualified English teachers; the number of foreign language teachers cannot, however, keep pace with the speed of enrollment. The consequence is big class sizes which result in lower teaching efficiency (Cai, 2003; Chan & Ni, 2003).

Moreover, with economic globalization, China's joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the successful bidding for the Olympic Games in 2008, improving communicative competence and cross-cultural

understanding and communication are becoming ever more urgent and significant (Fu, 2001; Wang & Liu, 2003; Xia, 2003) although there still exist some unbalanced needs due to the unbalanced economic development in different regions and areas (Yu, 2005). In addition, CE has been facing criticism from the government, media and society and some from the educational field as 'time-consuming,' 'low-efficiency,' 'dumb English' and 'deaf English' (Chen, 1998; Dai, 2001a; Jing, 1999; Hu, 2002), with the syllabus lagging behind the times and thereby coming in for criticism (Chen, 2002; Liu, 2002; Wu, 2002). The only way out lies in conducting educational reform within current budget limits (Wu, 2004).

In August 2001, the MOE issued *Several Proposals on Consolidating Undergraduate Teaching of Higher Education to Improve Teaching Quality*, which requires that undergraduate teaching create conditions and environments to use English and other foreign languages to teach common courses and specific courses so that within three years, "courses conducted in English will reach between 5% and 10%" (MOE, 2001, p. 1).

In December 2002, the MOE issued the *Notice on Launching Part of College English Reform Projects.* This mandated that "to further promote College English teaching reform and continually improve College English teaching quality, the MOE has decided to initiate part of College English reform projects, which mainly include: developing *College English Curriculum Requirements*, constructing College English web- and multimedia-based teaching system, and reforming CET Bands 4 and 6 (http:// www.moe.edu.cn)" (MOE, 2002, p. 1).

In April 2002, Zhang (2002) indicated the importance of foreign language as a means to increase international competition, and pointed out the achievements that CE teaching had gained over the past twenty years, the existing problems in CE teaching, and further indicated six suggestions for improving practical English teaching. In the same year, the MOE initiated the CE Reform Project to better meet social, economical and personal developmental needs. In December 2003, the MOE issued the *Notice on Deploying College English Teaching Reform Experimental Sites* to encourage colleges and universities to actively participate in CE reform.

In January 2004, the MOE issued the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (Trial Version). In December 2004, the MOE launched the First Batch of College English Teaching Reform Extension Projects, with each project given approximately US $1,300 in research funding. Many universities began to revitalize their school-based syllabus aiming at improving learners' communicative competence, in particular their productive skills to better meet both social and learners' needs (Chen, 2004; Jia, 2004;

Luo & Zhang, 2004; Wang, 2004; Zhao & Huang, 2004). Among 288 volunteer colleges and universities across the nation, 180 were selected to conduct educational reforms, using recommended software (http://www.moe.edu.cn).

In 2005, the MOE issued the *Notice on Ratification of the Second Batch of College English Teaching Reform Extension Projects* to further promote College English reform. Another important event taking place in 2005 was the reform of CET Bands 4 and 6 (http://www.moe.edu.cn). In 2006, after over a year's trialing and experimentation, 60 among the 180 universities were recommended as successful experimental universities. It can be seen, therefore, that CE reform is multi-faceted, taking place at different levels of universities and in different areas across the country, demonstrating a paradigm shift in CE teaching from teacher-centered/dominated teaching to learner-centered learning.

ANALYSIS OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

In this part, a proposed conceptual framework, which is developed after an extensive study of different curriculum development models, is introduced and used as a scaffolding framework in analyzing the *CECR* (Trial Version).

A Proposed Conceptual Framework

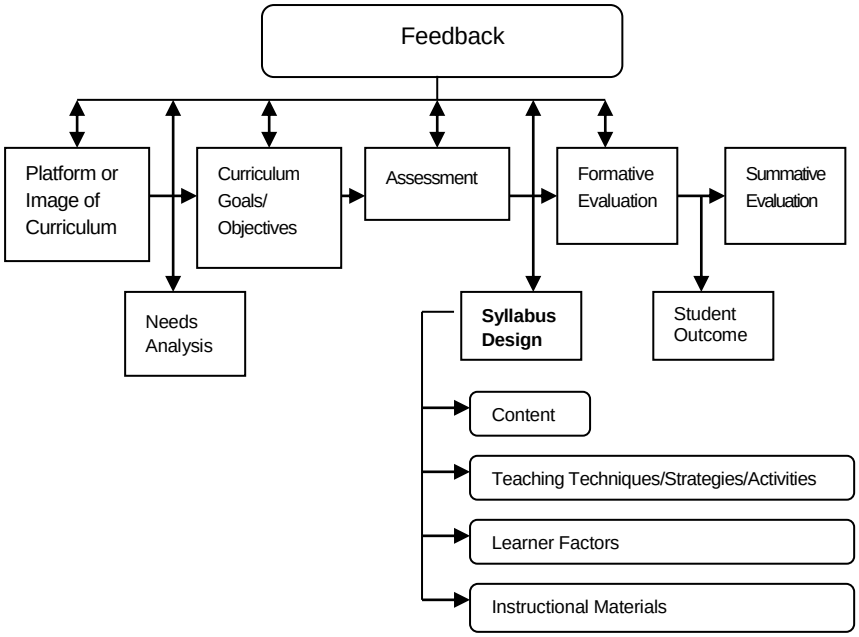
Nunan (1988) states that in EFL "there has been a comparative neglect of systematic curriculum development. In particular, there have been few attempts to apply, in any systematic fashion, principles of curriculum development to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of language program" (p. 1). The significance of establishing a language curriculum framework and of adopting comprehensive and integrated approaches to language curriculum development and syllabus design can, therefore, be appropriately created. In this part a proposed comprehensive language curriculum framework (see Figure 5), developed on the basis of linguistic, curriculum and systems instruction perspectives, is used in conducting a critical analysis of the *CECR*, the official curriculum in Mainland China.

Structural Components of the College English Curriculum Requirements

On the basis of the three syllabuses issued respectively in 1985, 1986

and 1999, in January 2004, the MOE issued the *CECR*, consisting of the following six parts (MOE, 2004, p. 10).

FIGURE 5
A Proposed Comprehensive Language Curriculum Framework (Nunan, 1988, p. 1)



Part 1: The characteristics, goals
Part 2: Teaching requirements
Part 3: Course design
Part 4: Teaching model
Part 5: Evaluation
Part 6: Teaching administration

An analysis of the component parts of CE curriculum will now be conducted on the basis of the proposed conceptual framework laid out above.

Module 1 Curriculum Platform or Image

Reid and Walker (1975) believe that the *platform* refers to the principles

and beliefs that guide curriculum developers in their deliberations. The 'platform or the image of curriculum' as Leithwood (1981) states, is the base, or foundation, of the whole system. The fundamental question underlying the platform is what knowledge is the most worthwhile (Apple, 1990).

"Because educational practice is concerned with the achievement of certain desired end states, it relies on a larger value matrix to secure and justify the directions in which it moves" (Eisner, 1992, p. 302). Different ideological and philosophical assumptions of curriculum are given in different books, showing the different perspectives taken in inquiring curriculum. Eisner and Vallance (1974, p. 3) propose five commonly cited orientations: the cognitive processes approach, curriculum for self-actualization and consummatory experiences, curriculum for social reconstruction, academic rationalism, and curriculum as technology. These five orientations are not exclusive but compatible with each other in curriculum development. From a philosophical orientation, the *CECR* takes quite an eclectic philosophical stand as a starting point.

With regards to the *cognitive process approach*, the curriculum aims at improving learners' cognitive development, and the construction of knowledge structure both logically and psychologically.

With regards to *self-actualization*, the curriculum focuses on improving learners' self-learning competence and comprehensive cultural competence. The current curriculum takes into consideration of diversified needs and learning aptitudes of learners.

With regards to *social construction*, the curriculum emphasizes satisfying the needs of social and economic development and international communication needs. Thus, it enables the learners to better satisfy the globalization and competitive needs of the country in the 21st century.

With regards to *academic rationalism*, the curriculum aims at cultivating learners' comprehensive communicative competence, in particular listening and speaking skills, which both cultivates learners' mental faculty and language communicative skills.

With regards to *curriculum as technology*, the curriculum focuses on incorporating information communication technology (ICT) into CE teaching and learning to transform and revitalize teaching modes and approaches. This orientation is becoming the dominating force in the CE reform and has caused some daunting challenges concerning the roles that teachers play.

Module 2 Needs Analysis

"Procedures used to collect information about learners' needs are known

as needs analysis" (Richards, 2001, p. 51). In the language teaching/ learning arena, needs analysis emerged in the 1960s as part of a systems approach to curriculum development, with techniques developed to analyze the product and learners' needs (Clark, 1987; Munby, 1978). Needs analysis subsequently played a significant role in the area of English for specific purposes (ESP). The proposed factors for identifying needs are: subject matter, learner and learning, teacher and teaching, and milieu, which correspond to Schwab's four commonplaces (Posner, 2004; Schubert, 1986). Empirical research studies, both qualitative and quantitative, are essential in conducting needs analysis (Gui, 2004; Zhao, 2002).

Before developing the current curriculum, a national survey was conducted by the English Group of the Advisory Committee of Foreign Language Teaching (Cai, 2006). Other surveys relating to learners' needs were also conducted, showing that there was an increasing demand for listening and speaking skills (Fu, Pang & Zhou, 2001; Li, 2004; Xia, 1999). Further investigations suggested that students' satisfaction with College English was low due to the stultifying teaching modes, learning contents, and teaching approaches (Cai, 2003; Wang, 2002; Xia, 2003).

The *CECR* urges colleges and universities to "formulate, in accordance with the Requirements and in the light of their specific circumstances, a scientific, systematic and individualized CE syllabus to guide their own CE teaching" (MOE, 2004, p. 22). This requires each individual college or university to conduct a scientific and systematic analysis of the four commonplaces – subject matter, learner and learning, teacher and teaching, and milieu or situational context, in the process of making situational-based or process-based curriculums (Hu, 2002; Huang, 2002).

Module 3 Curriculum Goals and Objectives

The terms *aims*, *goals* and *objectives* are frequently used in curriculum documents, although these vary in scope from broad statements of belief about what is educationally desirable over relatively long periods of time to specific statements which identify student behavior, curriculum content to be covered, conditions under which behavior is elicited and acceptable standards of student performance (Leithwood, 1981; Strevens, 1977). All language curriculums need to operate with clearly-stated goals, with objectives, and goals and objectives manifesting a rationale for the whole curriculum (Richards, 1990, 2001).

The goal of the *CECR* is to "develop students' ability to use English in an all-round manner, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future work and social interactions they will be able to exchange

information effectively through both spoken and written channels, and at the same time be able to enhance their ability to study independently and improve their cultural quality so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges" (MOE, 2004, p. 23, see Part 1). This shows the transition of emphases from a focus on reading skills to a more comprehensive communicative skills, in particular listening and speaking skills.

The objectives of the *CECR* are stated at three hierarchical levels – basic, intermediate and higher requirements, in the form of can-do statements concerning listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills with recommended vocabulary for each level (MOE, 2004, pp. 24-29, see Part 2). The classification of the three levels of language skills is to better cater for the diversified situational and learning needs (Wang, 2004 & 2006; Wu, 2003; Zhang, 2002).

Although the *CECR* states that "The three levels of requirements, which incorporate knowledge and practical skills of the English language, learning strategies and intercultural communication, embody qualitatively and quantitatively the objective of CE teaching" (MOE, 2004, pp. 23-23), there is actually no statement of knowledge objectives, cognitive objectives, affective objectives and learning strategies. With regards to vocabulary, the minimum requirement for the three levels of requirements are 4,500, 5,500, and 6,500 words respectively, although the vocabulary stock has come in for a certain amount of criticism because of the low demand on vocabulary (Cai, 2004; Chen, 1998a; Wang, 2002).

Module 4 Assessment

Assessment in this framework refers to test items and test forms. The terms *item* and *form* are employed in a generic sense to refer to any means used to check the validity of the objectives and determine the extent to which students have achieved the objectives of a curriculum (Dick et al., 2001; Leithwood, 1981). The purpose of including assessment in the framework is to "provide the most specific statement of a developer's or policymaker's intentions for student outcomes" (Leithwood, 1981, p. 29).

By December 2003, four recommended sets of software platforms were developed: the *Experiencing College English* (Higher Education Press); *New Age Interactive English* (Tsinghua Publishing House); *New Horizon College English* (Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Publishing House); and *College English (New Edition)* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Publishing House). These were recommended by the MOE as self-learning and assessment tools (http://www.moe.edu.cn; Wang, 2006).

Module 5 Syllabus Design

Syllabus design is an aspect of pedagogical organization, and concerns the problem of how best to arrange and interrelate areas of knowledge and experience – the sequencing of learning and the connecting of ideas and meanings (Brown, 1995; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Syllabus is hence used in a narrow sense. Broadly speaking, language teaching since the 1950s seems to have been concerned with methodology, with *how* rather than *what* to teach (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001). In the present decade, syllabus design and content have been receiving an increasing amount of attention (Richards, 2001). With regard to the types of syllabuses proposed by White (1988), the *CECR* is a type of skill-based syllabus, situated between content-based syllabuses and method-based syllabuses as there are only statements of required skills (MOE, 2004, pp. 24-28). A more "scientific, systematic and individualized College English syllabus" can be formulated by individual colleges and universities "in the light of their specific circumstances" (MOE, 2004, p. 22), and situational contexts. Syllabus design subsumes five subcategories as laid out below.

(i) Content

The design of syllabus content incorporates two aspects: *selection* and *grading* (Richards, 2001; Strevens, 1977). In terms of content selection, the concept of a 'common core' of language or general proficiency is raised (Ingram, 1984; Stern, 1983), incorporating vocabulary selection and grammar gradation (Johnson, 1989; Richards, 2001). In the *CECR*, the vocabulary list (2004, pp. 53-130), the phrasal verb list (2004, pp. 131-153) and the active vocabulary list (2004, pp. 154-180) compiled on the basis of the *Collins Bank of English* are suggested. Unlike previous syllabuses, the *CECR* does not include any grammatical content.

In terms of course systems, each university is encouraged to design its own course system according to its own situational context. "The course system, which is a combination of required and selective courses in comprehensive English, language skills, English for practical uses, language and culture, and English for specific purposes, should ensure that students at different levels receive adequate training and make improvement in their ability to use English" (MOE, 2004, p. 29, see Part 3).

Not only is linguistic competence emphasized, so is cross-cultural communicative competence and cultural appreciation as is stated in the *CECR*. "When designing College English courses, therefore, it is necessary to take into full consideration the development of students' cultural

capacity and the teaching of knowledge about different cultures in the world" (MOE, 2004, p. 30, see Part 3).

Humanism is also taken into full consideration, which is declared in the *CECR*. "All the courses, whether computer-based or classroom based, should be fully individual-oriented, taking into account students with different starting points, so that students who start from lower levels will be taken good care of while students whose English is better will find room for further development … to meet the needs of their development in different specialties" (MOE, 2004, p. 30, see Part 3). Self-actualization and self-development can therefore be seen to be one of the key focuses of the syllabus design.

(ii) Teaching techniques, strategies, and activities

Teaching strategies refers to "patterns of teacher behavior designed to facilitate student learning" (Leithwood, 1981, p. 31). Effective language learning/language teaching (LL/LT) is achieved via a mixture of techniques (Strevens, 1977). Studies have shown that teaching is a dynamic, interactional process in which the teacher's methods/techniques results from the processes of interaction between the teacher, the learners, and the instructional tasks and activities over time (Chall 1967; Richards 1990; Stern, 1983; Swaffar, Arens & Morgan, 1982).

One of the main focuses of the *CECR* involves revitalizing the existing teacher-centered mode of teaching using ICT, which "should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that English language teaching will be free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students' individualized and autonomous learning" (MOE, 2004, p. 30, see Part 4). The following are some recommended modes: large class lecturing and small class practicing; classroom teaching and open self-access learning; multimedia teaching and web-based teaching; classroom teaching and extracurricular activities (Wang, 2004). It is also recommended that "the credits acquired via computer-based learning account for 30%-50% of the total" (MOE, 2004, p. 32, see Part 4).

Although it is not stated or required in the *CECR*, it is common knowledge that teachers need to be computer literate in order to implement the new modes of teaching. It is, therefore, important for teachers to be both language competent and computer competent in conducting CE teaching. The introduction of ICT does not mean that technology is going to take the place of teachers but that it can help alleviate the teacher shortage and complement classroom teaching.

(iii) Learner factors

Learners are key factors in curriculum development (Richards, 1990; Strevens, 1977). The *CECR* show a transition from teacher-centered learning to learner-centered learning, focusing on learner development. "An important indicator of the successful reform of the teaching model is the development of individualized study methods and the autonomous learning ability on the part of students" (MOE, 2004, p. 31, see Part 4). The self-assessment checklist enables learners to check their learning progress and the adoption of information technology can better cater for students' diverse learning needs, learning styles and learning aptitudes to develop their self-autonomy in language learning (Wu, 2005; Zhang, 2002).

(iv) Teacher factors

Teachers play a key role in the successful implementation of curriculum change as different teachers may adopt different teaching philosophies and perspectives. They may vary in the following dimensions: language proficiency; teaching experience; skill and expertise; training and qualifications; morale and motivation; teaching style; and beliefs and principles (Richards, 2001). At present, CE teachers have quite a heavy workload with a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:130 (Cai, 2006).

According to the *CECR*, it is important to establish a system of faculty management and development to guarantee the long-term development of the CE discipline and enable teachers to be more competent in conducting CE reform. "Opportunities should be created so that the teachers can enjoy sabbaticals and engage in advanced studies, thus ensuring a sustainable improvement in their academic performance and methods of teaching" (Dai, 2006, p. 8). It is hence important for teachers to change their roles from knowledge providers to facilitators and practitioners (Dai, 2006).

(v) Instructional materials

Instructional materials play a significant role in most language programs with materials development being a well-researched area in recent years (Brown, 1995; Cunningsworth, 1995; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Richards, 1990; Strevens, 1977; Tomlinson, 1998). Textbooks have been the main source of English learning for most students in China. Since the 1980s, the number of CE textbooks available has increased from two popularly-used textbook series around the country to currently seven textbook series recommended by the MOE. In addition, many provincially and locally developed textbooks are available, which are rich in content and culture, and therefore generally relevant to students' present and future life and needs (Cai, 2006). The current *CECR*, however, provides no

communicative topics, communicative tasks and functions as those suggested by the European Council's *Common European Framework of Reference* (van Ek, 1975). It is, therefore, recommended that the *CECR* include more practical information on communicative themes, tasks and functions to provide guidelines for material and software development in syllabus design.

Module 6 Evaluation of Instruction

Evaluation concerns gathering data on the dynamics, effectiveness, acceptability, and efficiency of a program to facilitate decision making (Hewings & Dudley-Evans 1996; Jarvis & Adams 1979; Popham 1975; Richards 1990). The evaluation process applies to all phases of curriculum development. This enables curriculum and syllabus designers to assess the progress of the learning process and supply justifiable feedback information of the present system, thereby providing information for further improvement of the system. Evaluation can be conducted in two ways (quantitatively and qualitatively) and in two forms (formative and summative). The evaluation in the *CECR* consists of both forms of assessment.

Formative evaluation refers to "evaluation designed to collect data and information that is used to improve a program or product; conducted while the program is still being developed" (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2001, p. 374). Formative evaluation includes "students' self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment conducted by teachers and school administrator" (MOE, 2004, pp. 32-33, see Part 5). Various procedures, both quantitative and qualitative, such as students' online and offline learning records, learning portfolio and e-portfolios, observation and interviews, are encouraged to be conducted aiming at addressing the following criteria: the appropriateness of the objectives, the effectiveness of the syllabus design and instructional implementation and the eventual outcomes to improve teaching and learning.

Summative evaluation refers to "evaluation designed and used after an instructional program has been implemented and formative evaluation completed. The purpose is to provide information for the justification on the worth of the program or product and make recommendations about its adoption or retention" (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2001, p. 375). In the proposed model, summative evaluation, which can be conducted either internally or externally, is located outside the system framework as its chief function is for decision-making.

The summative evaluation in the *CECR* refers to "final tests and

proficiency tests" (MOE, 2004, p. 24) to assess students' competence in using English. As a result, "colleges and universities may administer tests of their own, run tests at the intercollegiate or regional level, or let students take the national test" (MOE, 2004, p. 24) (i.e., CET Band 4). In addition, CE teaching is considered an important evaluation item in the overall teaching quality evaluation of each university.

Module 7 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are the intended outcome of the proposed curriculum (Stern, 1983). It is further important to distinguish between immediate and long-term outcomes. Immediate outcomes, as are reflected in goals and objectives, are important for feedback to further teaching and learning, using diagnostic and formative evaluation. The interactive and dynamic feedback chain needs to form an ecological system whereby long-term outcomes are evaluated by learners, teachers, institutions and society at large.

CONCLUSION

After clarifying two commonly-used but often ill-defined terms – *curriculum* and *syllabus* – the current chapter has introduced a number of commonly-adopted curriculum development models and types of language syllabus as a foundation for later discussion. The chapter first explored the development of CE education over the past 56 years from a historical perspective. It then presented a critical analysis of the current *CECR* conducted via the proposed conceptual framework laid out on the basis of curriculum theories, language syllabus organization and systems design, and forming an integrated, interactive dynamic ecosystem in language syllabus design and curriculum development.

After a somewhat turbulent initial period, CE is now on a rather steadier footing. The analysis presented in this chapter suggests, nonetheless, that for CE curriculum development to maintain upward momentum, considerable work remains to be done. The curriculum is currently somewhat dominated in terms of its orientation to technology. This is in line with current trends in language education. However, given the vast amount of teacher training required in the first place to implement the essence of CE reform, the additional resources and demands that technology places upon the system suggest that the focus on technology is possibly somewhat ambitious given present circumstances. Further,

nationwide investigations need to be conducted in order to get a clearer picture of the discrepancies that exist between the desirable and actual needs, learning effects and goal-statements, and to bridge these deficiencies. The goals and objectives could be extended to include requirements such as knowledge, affective and learning strategies in addition to the can-do statements regarding the mastery of skills. The syllabus design, as the core of the curriculum content selection and organization, needs to provide detailed information and guideline to teachers, students, test designers and textbook writers on how to make full use of the official curriculum. It is, to some extent, currently deficient in these areas. Diversified curriculums need to be developed and encouraged given each university's particular situation. Not only should summative evaluation be used for decision-making and judgment of the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation, formative evaluation also needs to be considered as an integral component in the whole teaching and learning process if CE teaching is to be upgraded and brought into line with current innovation trends and demands.

The analysis of the CE curriculum outlined in this chapter suggests that the proposed conceptual framework can be used both as a design and analytical guideline in curriculum development, syllabus design and instructional implementation. Moving from understanding to interpreting the *CECR* as an official curriculum is just one step in the long march in implementing an operational curriculum, a process curriculum and a situational curriculum. In analyzing the *CECR*, it is therefore significant for us to rethink, reconstruct and reconceptualize official curriculum documents in the light of its implementation in each university's situational context.

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