Redefining the Syllabus:
An Investigation Into Whether Syllabuses Can Meet Learners' Linguistic and Social Needs.

1. Introduction

ELT is most commonly seen as an educational practice, with internal debates focusing, for example, on the method, syllabus, content, and materials of teaching. However, a wealth of literature convincingly argues that ELT should also be considered within a wider social (and ethical) perspective - that of its development as a global profit-making industry within an unequal capitalist world-economy, and its use as a tool of government policies[1]. It is therefore an issue from which power and political interest cannot be removed.

In this paper, I aim to examine an ethical critique of current ELT practices and try to establish its validity by problematizing the issue of syllabus development. I shall therefore discuss the difficulties inherent in both defining and designing 'traditional' syllabuses (those designed by 'experts'). This will refer to the linguistic and social problems built in to such syllabuses. I shall then turn to the ideas of Freire (1970) , a non-ELT practitioner, and investigate whether and how his ideas can be incorporated into ELT syllabus development. Thus, I hope to show how the ethical critique of ELT can be met by adoption and adaptation of Freire's approach. This will involve an examination of both English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language teaching contexts.

2. The Ethical Critique

In his provocative critique of ELT, Rogers (1982) accuses the ELT industry of 'dishonesty', arguing that problems are not solved but created by its practitioners. Referring to Freire's (1970) thesis that no syllabus is neutral, he finds four main areas of concern - the raising of false hopes; problems of cost effectiveness; the cultural imposition of non-neutral values by ELT professionals in host countries (whereby learning English is portrayed as a passport to membership of Western-style modernity); and a continued maintenance of teacher:learner dichotomies within mass education programmes. Rogers convincingly shows these problems as a

set of causal relations locked in a vicious circle, as I have shown in Diagram 1, and concludes that although "a lot of English is taught, not enough is learned" (p. 144).

Practitioner domination of ELT

Cultural imposition of values ('English is best')

Professional justification for high spending

Raising of false hopes (English will provide a better life)

High costs of ELT programmes

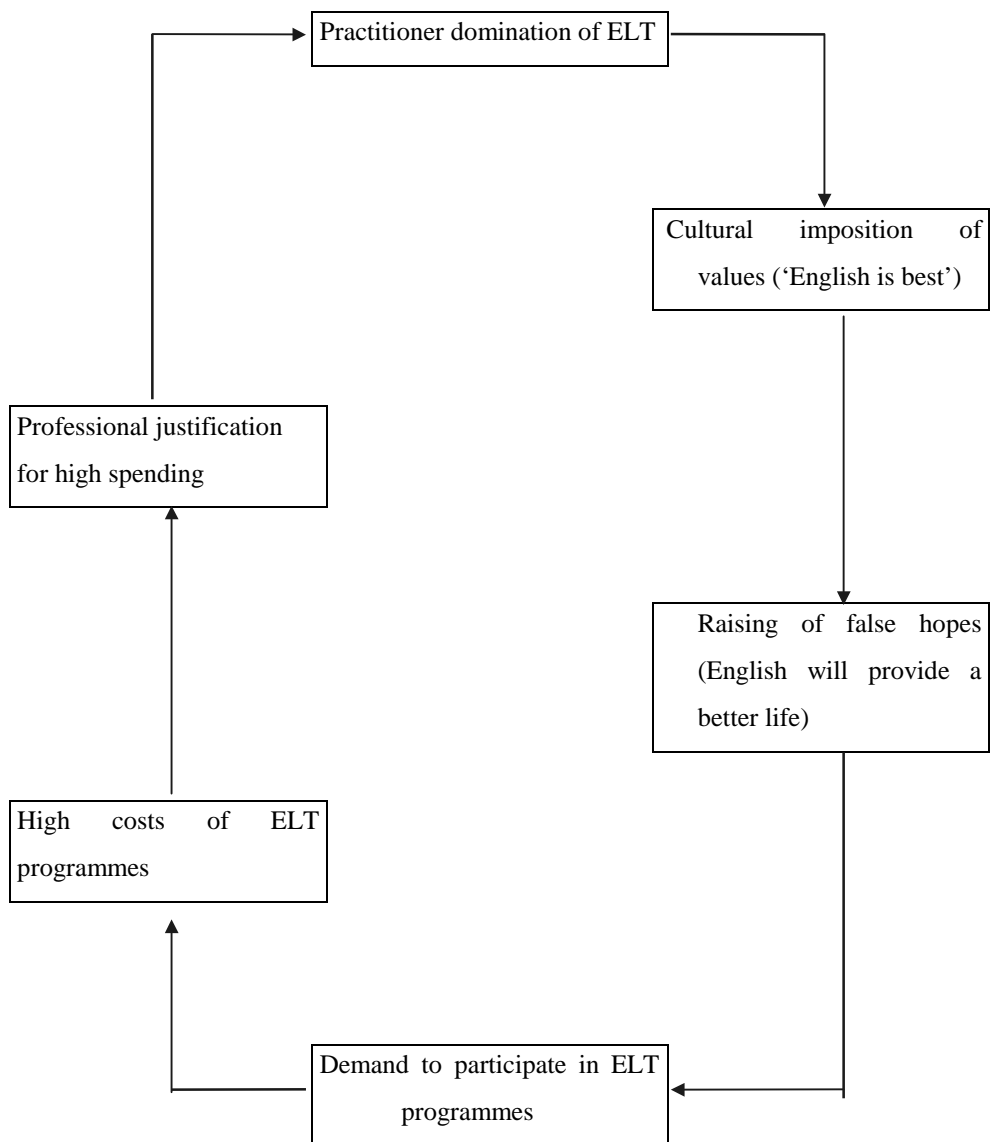Demand to participate in ELT programmes

Diagram 1. The Causal Relationships behind Rogers' Ethical Critique of ELT

Whilst not denying the existence of this vicious circle, responses to Rogers deal reasonably successfully with two of his claims. In separate articles, Orszulok and Smith (both 1983) reply that achieving cost-effectiveness through cost reductions, and the raising of false hopes, would involve an unacceptable level of selection early in the education process. They maintain that cost-efficiency and the ethics of mass education programmes are not problems which ELT professionals can deal with, arguing that they should instead be left to administrators and governments[2].

However, neither response deals adequately with Rogers' charges of cultural imposition, teacher:learner dichotomies, and the mismatch between teaching and learning within ELT. Thus I shall pay particular regard to these issues in my discussion of the syllabus.

3. Defining a Syllabus: some conceptual difficulties

Clarifying the concept of *syllabus* is extremely problematic. There seem to be as many definitions as definers, each apparently covering similar ground, whilst containing various nuances and differences in emphasis. If the ***curriculum*** is "all the relevant decision-making processes of all the participants" (Johnson, 1989), the syllabus is its result. However, as perceptions of syllabus requirements and resulting decisions change, so too do definitions. For example, Pienemann (1985: 23) sees the syllabus as "the selection and grading of linguistic teaching objectives", whilst for Breen (1984: 47) it "is a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning". On close examination, however, both these definitions seem flawed - Pienemann's emphasis on *linguistic* objectives missing the possible non-linguistic functions of a syllabus (which Freire emphasises), and Breen's attention to *achievement* seeming to overlook the indeterminate relationship between what is taught and what is learnt (the views of Allwright (1994) and Nunan (1988) on this matter will be examined later). Other definitions of syllabus could be listed and dealt with in similar ways.

Despite these difficulties, a working understanding of what I mean by ***syllabus*** is needed. I will here follow Candlin's summary of a syllabus:

> Syllabuses are concerned with the specification and planning of what is
> to be learned, frequently set down in some written form as prescriptions
> for action by teachers and learners. They have, traditionally, the mark

> of authority. They are concerned with the achievement of ends, often, though not always, associated with the pursuance of particular means. (Candlin,1984:30).

Whilst acknowledging that this summary can be challenged (indeed I shall return to it in more detail later), I feel it recognises most of the academic and social implications of syllabuses without specifically *prescribing* the results and processes of syllabus design. It thus provides a sufficiently broad base from which to continue my discussion.

4. Specialist Approaches to Syllabus Design: a circular argument

Johnson (1989) identifies two philosophies of curriculum and syllabus design - a 'specialist approach' (which I would prefer to identify as a 'top-down' process), and a 'learner-centred approach' ('bottom-up'). Many participants contribute to the top-down process - policy-makers, needs analysts, methodologists, materials writers, teacher trainers, teachers, and finally the learners themselves, producing a syllabus which, to a critic, seems simply designed by a 'specialist', given to the teacher, and 'taught' to the students.

In recent decades, top-down syllabuses have followed a series of differing approaches. Indeed, Clark (1982) maintains that the rapidity of transition and fierceness of debate between approaches has been such that 'bandwagons' have developed (reflecting Kuhn's 'paradigmatic' approach to 'advances'/changes in knowledge). Hence, previous approaches are discounted and even derided, as the current trend becomes prescriptive. Easy solutions are offered to complex problems as new types of syllabus are presented as panaceas for the problems of teachers and learners. To illustrate his criticisms and place Rogers' criticisms of ELT in context, a brief review of the main syllabus debates is necessary. This discussion will broadly follow the syllabus classification scheme offered by Allwright (1997).

4.1 Paradigms of the 'Top-Down' Syllabus

i. The bulk of research seems to classify syllabus through **content**. Older, *structural* syllabuses,[3] have been regularly attacked for lacking a true understanding of language and communicative value by proponents of *functional-notional*[4] syllabuses (e.g. Wilkins, 1981).

However, the functional-notional syllabus has, in return, been attacked by semi-defenders of structural approaches (e.g. Swan (1990) maintains that a structural:functional dichotomy is essentially false, and that meanings are implicit within structural approaches due to learners' understanding of their native language). Functional:notional ideas have also been critiqued by, amongst others, Brumfit (1981) who maintains that the difficulty of defining a 'notion' and the negotiation of social meaning within social contexts seriously undermine its claims to provide an effective syllabus for learners. Supporters of the *situational*[5] syllabus, and the *communicative*[6] group of approaches have added to the attack. They in turn have been criticised by, amongst others, Swan (1990), who regards the idea of learners actually having to *learn* communication from scratch as fundamentally flawed.

This brief review shows the somewhat circular nature of these paradigmatic arguments, as the participants seem to largely discount the contributions of others. It seems ironic that Wilkins states that:

> there are limits to what can be achieved through grammatical and situational syllabuses both leave the learner short of communicative capacity (1976:18)

whilst Brumfit (1981) makes almost identical claims regarding Wilkins' favoured functional:notional syllabus. Thus, I feel that the regular replacement of paradigmatic ideas (Clarke's 'bandwagons') illustrates that content-bound syllabuses cannot be sure of, and thus cannot supply, the answer to what constitutes effective teaching and learning.

ii. Syllabus ***organisation*** often focuses on ideas of comparative *difficulty*[7]. However, behind this seemingly common-sense concept lies the very real problem of discovering what material is difficult for learners. Investigations by Upshur (1968), Hauptmann (1971), and Larsen (1974) all examine this question. Larsen notes that learners may need to use 'difficult' structures earlier than a difficulty-oriented syllabus introduces them, and Hauptmann is unable to find regular structural and situational patterns of difficulty amongst learners. (Difficulty is also the usual organising principle of the *linear*[8] and *spiral*[9] syllabuses). Larsen thus offers *utility*[10] as a possible principle of syllabus sequencing, although again there seem to be substantial problems in discovering what is more/less useful for learners.

6

It seems, therefore, that 'external' syllabuses cannot satisfactorily establish what is 'easy', 'difficult' or 'useful' for learners, and that the arguments of 'experts' are essentially unresolvable. Thus the implementation of such syllabuses seems to involve syllabus writer and teacher imposition on learners. Rogers' critique of ELT starts to be substantiated. I feel that the answers to these sequencing dilemmas must lie elsewhere, and I shall return to this issue later.

iii. Syllabuses can be ***presented*** through *synthesis[11]* or *analysis[12]* (Wilkins, 1976) (Allwright (1997) reverses the meaning of the same terminology). I agree with Wilkins' claims that flaws seem to exist in these approaches, *synthesis* seeming to leave learners short of communicative competence until re-synthesis takes place, whilst *analysis* leaves them unprepared for anything 'out of the ordinary' due to its approximation of the learners' own linguistic behaviour. Again, 'expert' syllabus preparation seems flawed.

4.2 Do 'Top-Down' Syllabuses Really Help?

Johnson (1989) argues that the specialist, top-down approach has several strengths. These include 'expert' input, clear formulation of objectives and perhaps most importantly, they are also transferable (i.e. they can "be used by teachers and learners other than those involved in their initial development" (p 14)). Institutions, teachers and learners are relieved of a responsibility that they might not be prepared for or want. I believe, however, that this view is detrimental (and patronising) to learning, learners, and teachers, and is far outweighed by the disadvantages of a top-down approach. These disadvantages can, perhaps somewhat artificially, be divided into two main areas - theoretical problems of syllabus design, and practical problems of syllabus implementation.

4.2.1 Theoretical Problems of Top-Down Syllabus Design

As I have shown, each type of syllabus contains internal contradictions which, according to their critics, leave learners short of linguistic competency. The idea of just one syllabus being a panacea for language teaching and learning thus seems extremely improbable, as the circular nature of the debates, I believe, undermines any one syllabus type's claims of validity. Thus we are still 'in the dark' as to what the best syllabus is. The use of one syllabus or another seems very difficult to justify.

Secondly, in their discussions about the organisation of syllabus content, Larsen (1974) and Pienemann (1985) seem to implicitly accept that syllabus writers are rather detached from the actual learners in the classroom, at times having to 'guess' what learners can understand (Peinemann, same text). This questions the whole notion that an 'expert' can in fact successfully design syllabuses for the learner. Whilst Brumfit (1984: 79) proposes that experts 'fit' the syllabus to learners, I believe that this is an overly-optimistic view of what a top-down syllabus writer can in fact achieve through consideration of factors *external* to learners.

It seems clear that what Ellis (1993) calls "the built-in syllabus" is thus impossible to ignore. Syllabus writers need to recognise how a language is learnt and adapt syllabuses accordingly (Brumfit, 1981). Again, this is extremely problematic. Although Ellis identifies the need for learners to move from *explicit* to *implicit* knowledge (for example, from knowledge of 'rules' to internalised chunks of language which make use of these rules), and from *declarative* to *procedural* knowledge (knowledge as a set of facts to knowledge of how to do things), he offers only *possible* mechanisms for how this might be achieved. While this is a reasonable position for Ellis to adopt, it is difficult to reconcile with the supposed certainties of teaching and learning which I feel are implicit in a top-down syllabus. There appears to be a mismatch between what is *assumed* will be successful and what is *known* to be successful.

When examining Breen's (1984) definition of syllabus (see section 3), I noted his identification of 'syllabus' with 'achievement'. However, as Allwright (1984: 3) notes, lessons are "about different things for different learners". Thus there is no clear relationship between what is taught and what is learnt (indeed, there may be no relationship at all). He identifies five "possible and reasonably plausible" hypotheses for "why learners don't learn what teachers teach", all of which focus on the *internal* capacities of learners[13]. I again would like to highlight the uncertainty and debate present in theoretical approaches to learning. It seems that 'experts' and syllabus writers cannot be sure of learners' learning mechanisms and their resultant 'built-in' syllabuses. How, then, can top-down syllabuses effectively meet learners' needs?

Altogether, my discussion has exposed a complex web of theory surrounding the effectiveness of different syllabus types, the difficulty in organising these syllabuses, ways in which learners might internalise knowledge, and possible reasons why learners have different intakes from the same input. I believe that these debates cannot be satisfactorily resolved. As a result, it seems unlikely that a top-down syllabus can effectively provide learners with ideal conditions for learning, and thus fails to meet their linguistic needs. Thus from a 'learning' perspective, I believe that the learners themselves must take the lead in syllabus design. Returning to the arguments of Rogers (section 2), only in this way can the 'expert':learner and teaching:learning dichotomies start to be reduced.

4.2.2 Practical Problems of Top-Down Syllabus Implementation

Johnson (1989) notes the one-way flow of information inherent in a top-down syllabus, and the lack of interaction and consultation with the learner (which, as I have shown, imposes an external agenda on learners rather than mobilising their internal syllabuses). It also seems to regard teachers as unproblematic deliverers of the syllabus. As Candlin (1981) points out, this is rarely the case, teachers almost always using their own expertise to adapt and deliver the syllabus according to local circumstances. Thus, why have an imposed syllabus if its aims and objectives are often going to be altered and amended in ways not intended by its writer?

Top-down syllabuses also seem to regard learners as passive acceptors of language, whose motivations remain unquestioned (in Rogers' terminology, this is 'imposition' (see section 2)). To build on the ideas of Freire (1970), learners are seen as 'blank pages', receptacles of 'knowledge', not as individuals who can help construct the syllabus and the lesson. This 'ideal learner' is an unreal creation. Referring back to Allwright's (1984) ideas about disparities in teaching and learning, the emergence of Candlin's (1981) three part model of syllabus/learning outcome distortion is evident, whereby learning outcomes may be different to the intentions of the syllabus. I have illustrated this in Fig 2, on the following page.

I believe that the approaches I have examined fail to provide a theoretically coherent and practically workable 'learnable' syllabus. The apparently unsubstantiated and centralised assumptions about learners and learning seem to support Rogers' critique

of 'dishonest' ELT. Top-down syllabuses could lead to exactly those circumstances of cultural imposition, teacher:learner dichotomy, and 'not enough learning' that Rogers suggests by reflecting the writers' ideals and possibly mistaken understanding of learner and learning processes. (I shall expand this thesis in section 5.)

Thus, I believe that syllabus designers need to change their conceptions of both what a syllabus *is* and, consequently, *how* a syllabus should be developed. Hence, if we accept the need for instruction, a radically different idea of what this means *in the classroom* is needed (moving away from the syllabus:teacher:student flow of 'knowledge' to student-centred development).

5. A Different Type of Education: the ideas of Freire

In this section, I shall examine Freire's non-ELT based approach[14] to education , and attempt to relate this to the ELT syllabus. After justifying my earlier claim that the conceptions of a top-down syllabus support Rogers' critique, I also hope to provide a grounding for a student-centred syllabus model which can meet Rogers' criticisms of ELT, moving the syllabus away from purely linguistic concerns to social interests.
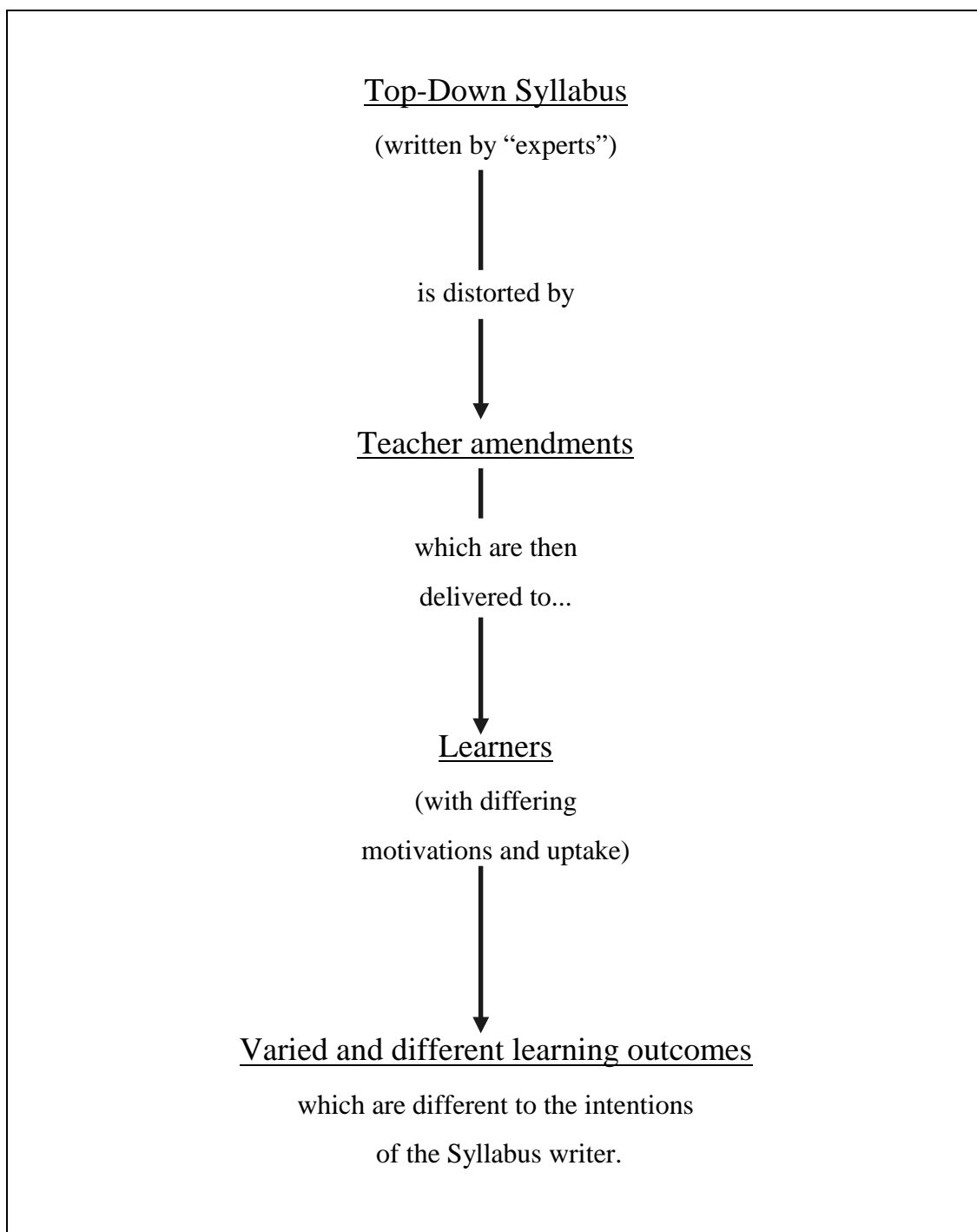
Top-Down Syllabus

(written by "experts")

is distorted by

Teacher amendments

which are then

delivered to...

Learners

(with differing

motivations and uptake)

Varied and different learning outcomes

which are different to the intentions

of the Syllabus writer.

Fig 2: A Model of Syllabus Intention/Learning Outcome Difference

In Freire's view, the neutral syllabus does not exist. Syllabuses either support or challenge what he sees as an oppressive *status quo*. To summarise this a little simplistically, syllabuses either portray the present as perfect (in Rogers' terms, 'the West is best'), or show a (liberated) future which has the potential to be perfect. He supports the latter, feeling that this can be achieved through "pedagogy *with* the oppressed, not *for* the oppressed" (p. 25). Although Freire is clearly talking in ideological terms, I feel that if Rogers' charges of 'dishonest' ELT practices are to be answered effectively, any response must, in part, recognise Freire's views (i.e. both Rogers' challenges and any response to them must 'speak the same language'). With this in mind, I would thus like to paraphrase Freire's statement, substituting "learner" for "oppressed" in the above quotation, whilst not forgetting its original ideological content. Thus, I would like to examine ELT as "pedagogy *with* the learner, not *for* the learner", developed through the syllabus.

As I have shown, top-down syllabuses regard learners as passive agents in the classroom, which Freire calls "the absoluting of ignorance". Knowledge is a 'bank' of information to be given to learners. Freire terms this "communiqué, not communicating" (p. 45), and I feel Candlin provides a similar image with his analogy of ELT as a "package deal - take it or leave it" (1984: 31).

Freire also lists several practices of 'bank' education which parallel Rogers' image of cultural imposition and teacher:learner dichotomy . Within my discussion of the ELT syllabus, the most notable are that

> the teacher chooses the programme content, and the students adapt to it; the teacher chooses and enforces this choice, and the students comply; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; the teacher thinks, and the students are thought about. (Freire, 1972: pp. 46-47).

In this discussion, I would like to substitute "syllabus" for "programme content".

Freire wants a transformation in education, moving from the transfer of ideologically loaded information to cognition. These new ideas of knowledge combine with new ideas of teaching. Here, solutions are not 'unveiled' to the learner, but found by the learner as part of a group in which the teacher participates but does not lead. Teachers and learners are thus peers - becoming 'teacher:learners' and 'learner:teachers' as lessons become a dialogue. As Auerbach and Burgess (1985) state, education thus

becomes 'an encounter', its purpose being democracy and equality, both in the classroom and in society at large.

I believe that Freire's powerful thesis, if implemented, would fulfil the criteria required to meet Rogers' criticisms of ELT. There is a redefinition of knowledge, of teaching, of the teacher, of education, and of the purposes of education. I also feel that it is possible to move some way towards Freire's objectives within the context of ELT, and that this can be achieved through the syllabus. I am aware, however, that my investigation operates within the context of a continuing ELT industry (including EFL[15] teaching), and thus the radicalism of Freire's core arguments concerning liberation and equality in society at large may be blunted. I shall concentrate my arguments around the democratisation of the classroom, and the implications this has for Rogers' ideas of cultural imposition, the teacher:learner dichotomy, and my earlier discussion of providing an appropriate syllabus for learners linguistic and social needs.

6. Learner-Centred Approaches to Syllabus Design

The ideas of Freire have been acknowledged by a number of writers. They seem especially relevant to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) (Wallerstein, 1983; Auerbach and Burgess 1985), and have also established a clear influence on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and the development of 'learner-centred' approaches to syllabus design.

6.1 The re-emergence of Learners

Prabhu (1992), in his conception of lessons as pedagogic and social events, notes the importance of contextual factors, and, in an echo of Freire's terminology, emphasises that lessons are 'experiences of growth'. As with Allwright (1984), he highlights interaction (between learners, and between the teacher and learners) as a possible key to learning. What is interesting about these views in terms of my discussion is that they both reintroduce the learners as a (*the*?) key participant in the learning process, and provide a theoretical basis for negotiated contributions to syllabus development by learners, which I shall now consider.

6.2 The Need for Negotiation

Candlin (1984) examines Freire's ideas within the context of ELT syllabuses. Taking a *critical* overview of the syllabus, he too notes that a syllabus is "a window on a particular set of social, educational, moral, and subject-matter values" (p. 30). He thus tries to problematize syllabus design, and, as much of my discussion so far reflects, argues that the assumptions that top-down syllabuses make (and the unintended outcomes they produce) leave them detached from learners. The challenge comes in attempting to redress this balance.

Based around the work of, amongst others, Breen (1984), Candlin suggests that the issues of "learnability" and "social ownership" (my terms) of the syllabus can only be approached through the learners themselves. This involves not only *asking* learners their views and trying to incorporate them, but a whole process of teacher:learner *negotiation* and renegotiation of the syllabus throughout the course of lessons (Breen (1984) refers to this as a *process* syllabus). The syllabus is thus much more than a 'route map' of a course, given to teachers and delivered to learners. It becomes a social *interaction.* This starts to meet Rogers' criticisms - cultural imposition by the teacher is far less likely if learners are actively contributing to, and indeed forming, the syllabus for themselves, and through this process of negotiation, the teacher is established as a peer. Candlin hopes "a mutual interest in personal objectives" may develop, reflecting the ideas of Freire.

Interaction (and, in the context of syllabus development, negotiation) focuses on far more than just content. Candlin maintains that purpose, method, content, and evaluation are all negotiable within this radically redefined syllabus, as "the how becomes interconnected with the what" (Candlin; 1984: 33). However, negotiation and re-negotiation clearly means that the syllabus cannot be defined and written at the start of a course (although the process could start with a pre-defined syllabus (or several syllabuses) as a negotiating topic). Candlin goes on to suggest that the syllabus should be written as retrospective record of the social outcomes within the classroom.

The notion of syllabuses as processes of interaction also builds on Allwright's (1984) hypothesis that interaction provides 'encounter opportunities' and factors leading to

'receptivity' for the learner (as I understand it, the main factor perhaps being learners' explicit interest and involvement in the interaction itself). Whilst the outcomes of these opportunities may differ for different learners, this in itself is not the crucial issue. What matters is that uptake occurs on the learners' own terms, and that their internal syllabuses are followed (i.e. unintended outcomes are no longer problematic as there is no overarching, imposed syllabus to match them against).

7. Blueprints for a Negotiated Syllabus

This view of the negotiated syllabus incorporates a solid foundation for both linguistic development and social empowerment. Constructed by the group, it should resolve who does what, with whom, with what resources, when, how, and for what learning purposes (Breen, 1984). As yet, however, it remains somewhat theoretical. How can it be put in to practice?

7.1 The Problem-Posing Syllabus

A radical Freirean perspective is introduced to ESL teaching by Wallerstein (1983). This aims to provide empowerment and a recognition of problematic social reality, not prescriptive unreality, for refugees and immigrants dealing with relatively 'hostile' and difficult social situations in countries where English is the official language. Thus the problems faced outside the classroom are both the purpose and motor of syllabus development (Allwright, 1997), as the curriculum aims to "give learners the tools and confidence for thinking critically and taking action in their own lives" (Wallerstein,1983: 6). Although rather more radical than, and operating in different circumstances to, ELT/EFL syllabuses, the approach is broadly similar to the learner-centred negotiated syllabus that I have examined, emphasising teacher participation, not leadership. Most notably, Wallerstein comments that "experiments cannot be transplanted, they must be re-created" by the participants involved (p 12). If this rationale exists behind the negotiated syllabus (as it should), Rogers' critique of ELT will be met as local approaches replace the global syllabuses.

7.2 Approaches within EFL

Whilst not dismissing the problem-posing syllabus as irrelevant to EFL, I believe that the social context of, for example, Wallerstein's programme (i.e. inner city Los Angeles) is not often matched in EFL teaching. Thus, whilst students should

be encouraged to 'bring their society into the syllabus', this may be more limited than in ESL programmes (for example, it is difficult to imagine a class of businessmen in a language school engaging in the kind of discussions that Freire and Wallerstein envisage).

We must thus examine the development of the syllabus negotiation process in more detail. Brumfit (1984:81) states that "however negotiable a syllabus is, there must be a starting point for negotiation", and I feel that it is in locating this starting point that true ownership of the syllabus will be revealed. Is everything truly negotiable? Who leads the negotiations and is the teacher really a peer? Do all learners participate in the negotiation process, or is it dominated by just a few? Indeed, do the learners respect and want to participate in the process at all? The successful resolution of these difficulties is extremely problematic, but it is only by successful resolution that the negotiated syllabus can fulfil its true potential and give ownership to learners, thus avoiding cultural imposition and teacher:learner dichotomy.

Nunan (1988) examines some of the problems surrounding syllabus negotiation. His work, which provides a wide-ranging practical model of the negotiated syllabus within an EFL context, stops well short of the social ideals and purposes of Freire and Wallerstein, although there are still clear parallels between the two approaches. For example, Nunan emphasises the negotiation of 'goals'. In a Freirean context, one such goal could be social emancipation.

Nunan recognises that learners might initially resist this process (Freire also recognises this problem). He argues that teachers may have to train and guide learners to set their own syllabus. Whilst this seems to undermine the concept of equality for the teacher and learners, it is a necessary stage in the overall development of negotiated syllabuses. But he departs from the ideas of Freire and Wallerstein in his belief that "the teacher is the *prime agent* of syllabus change" (p 13), not only in the initial learner-training process, but throughout the course syllabus development as a whole. Perhaps Wallerstein and Nunan represent the two extremes of Brumfit's "starting point of negotiation" (see previous page). However, I would like to suggest that if Nunan's agent becomes a *facilitator*, a compromise which both recognises learner resistance and maintains an emphasis on learner-centredness is reached.

A full summary of Nunan's approach is beyond the scope of this essay. However, despite its differences to Wallerstein's approach (it does not 'pose problems'), its emphasis on negotiation, the intertwining of method, syllabus and teaching, and its firm foundations of teacher:student interaction do seem to lead towards a satisfactory model of negotiated syllabus development within an EFL setting.

8. What Might the Future Hold ?

The implications of widespread negotiated syllabuses are difficult to predict. By removing the centralising forces of prescriptive syllabuses, a changing perception of what issues are important in language learning may develop. Maybe locally-based forms of English might be taught, which would fulfil local needs without resorting to standard British or American patterns of English. Thus learners could avoid labouring over a 'perfect' stress pattern which they do not actually need to reproduce to be understood in their own local circumstances. Local ownership might develop, not just of the syllabus, but of the language as a whole.

Similarly, the concentration on learners' views might mean the end of the paradigmatic approach to ELT, and develop the view that techniques for teaching/learning can be accumulated, not just introduced and rejected. Instead of *offering* choice, ELT practitioners might instead generate *choice* from the learners. Finally, the reduction in the imposition of teacher values will emphasis the need for students to listen to *each other* for solutions. Might this indeed lead to the self-revelation and re-humanisation of learners and the classroom which Freire advocates? Whatever the result, problems of cultural imposition (e.g. the over-use of Eurocentric textbooks, the imposition of non-local, teacher-led values) should be overcome.

9. Conclusion: 'Redefining the Syllabus'

My discussion started with a series of challenges raised by Rogers concerning 'dishonest' teaching, and examined the difficulties of defining a syllabus. I then discussed the problems inherent in top-down syllabuses. This involved concerns about the possible disparity between syllabus content and learners' 'internal syllabuses'. I then examined the appropriacy of Paulo Freire's ideas within the context of ELT. Learner-centred syllabuses emerged as a possible solution to both the linguistic and social problems surrounding syllabus design. I feel that they are more

suited to both learners' linguistic needs and the democratic requirements of the classroom.

Subsequently, using Candlin's (1984) idea of a retrospective syllabus, I now feel we can redefine the syllabus as: "what is, not what should be" (Nunan,1988). Within this definition, 'what is' emerges from the learners themselves, involving not only content, but also methods of presentation. As the teacher becomes a peer and a facilitator of learners, 'instruction' is radically redefined. Learners become more powerful and more autonomous within learning contexts. There thus needs to be a change in "the social genre of the lesson" (Prabhu, 1982) to encourage acceptance of the learner-centred syllabus amongst all its participants.

Freire argues strongly that the purpose of education, and implicitly the syllabus, should be social transformation and freedom. Whilst accepting his ideals, I feel that in practical terms, the ELT syllabus should aim to *enable* learners to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Therefore, the learner-centred, negotiated syllabus does *not* represent the abandonment of syllabuses. Rather, by focusing on learners instead of ELT practitioners, it reflects a shift in whose interests are served. Thus, the learner-centred syllabus may meet charges of 'not enough learning', cultural imposition and teacher:learner dichotomy by developing local ownership of the ELT syllabus.

<div align="right">Graham Hall</div>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allwright, R.L. (1984): *"Why Don't Learners Learn What Learners Teach? - The Interaction Hypothesis"* in **Singleton** and **Little** (eds): Language Learning In Formal and Informal Contexts. Dublin, I.R.A.L. pp. 3-18.

Allwright, R.L. (1997): Seminar notes from "Contributions To Language Learning I", M.A. E.L.T. Unit, Department of Applied Linguistics, Lancaster University. October-December 1997.

Apple, M.A. (1982): Education and Power. London, Ark.

Auerbach, E.R. and **Burgess, D.** (1985): *"The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL"*. TESOL Quarterly, Vol.19/3. pp. 475-495.

Breen, M.P. (1984): *"Process Syllabuses for the Language Classroom."* in **Brumfit, C.J.** (ed):General English Syllabus Design, ELT Documents 118. London, Pergamon Press/British Council. pp. 47-60.

Brumfit, C.J. (1981): *"The Notional Syllabus Revisited"*. Applied Linguistics, Vol 2/1. pp. 83-89.

Brumfit, C.J. (1984): *"Function and Structure of a State School for Learners of a*

Second or Foreign Language with Heterogeneous Needs." in **Brumfit, C.J.** (ed): General English Syllabus Design, ELT Documents 118. London, Pergamon Press/British Council. pp. 75-82.

Candlin, C.N. (1984): *"Syllabus Design as a Critical Process.*" in **Brumfit, C.J.** (ed): General English Syllabus Design, ELT Documents 118. London, Pergamon Press/British Council. 29-46.

Clark, M.A. (1982*): "On Bandwagons and Commonsense."* TESOL Quarterly, Vol.16/4.

Ellis, R. (1993): *"The Structural Syllabus and Second Language Acquisition."* TESOL Quarterly, Vol.27/1. pp. 91-113.

Freire, P. (1972): Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London, Penguin.

Hauptmann, P.C. (1971): *"A Structural Approach vs a Situational Approach to Foreign-Language Teaching."* Language Learning, Vol. 21/1. pp. 235-244.

Johnson, R.K. (1989): *" A Decision-Making Framework for the Coherent Language Curriculum."* in **Johnson, R.K.** (ed): The Second Language Curriculum. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-23.

Larsen, D.E. (1974): *"A Re-Evaluation of Grammatical Structure Sequencing"* in **Crymes** and **Norris** (eds): On TESOL. Washington D.C., TESOL. pp. 151-161.

Nunan, D. (1988): The Learner-Centred Curriculum. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Orszulok, L. (1983): *"Correspondence"* . ELT Journal, Vol 37/3. p. 290.

Pienemann, M. *(1985): "Learnability and Syllabus Construction."* in **Hyltenstam** and **Pienemann** (eds): Modelling and Assessing Second Language Aquisition. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters. pp. 23-75.

Prabhu, N.S. (1992): *"The Dynamics of the Language Learning Lesson."* TESOL Quarterly,Vol. 26/2.

Rogers, J. (1982): *"The World for Sick Proper."* ELT Journal, Vol.36/3. pp 144-151.

Smith, D.(1983): *"Correspondence."* ELT Journal, Vol.37/1. p. 104.

Swan, M. (1990): *"A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach"* in **Rossner, R.** and **Bolitho, R**.(eds): Currents of Change in English Language Teaching. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Upshur, J.A. (1968): *"Four Experiments on the Relation between Foreign Language Teaching and Learning."* Language Learning, Vol. XVIII/1 and 2. pp. 111-124.

Wallerstein, N. (1983): Language and Culture in Conflict: Problem-posing in the ESL Classroom. London, Addison-Wesley.

Wilkins, D.A. (1976): *"Approaches to Language Syllabus Design"* Chapter 1 of **Wilkins, D.A.**: Notional Syllabuses. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Wilkins, D.A. (1981): *"The Notional Syllabus Revisited."* Applied Linguistics, Vol.2/1. pp. 83-89.

<u>Endnotes</u>

---

[1] For example, Lord Bonham-Carter, former Director of Collins Publishers, states "If you are taught English English, you are likely to buy books from this country; if you are taught American English, you are likely to buy books and other goods from the United States of America." (House of Lords, 20/1/1988), quoted in the British Council Publication *1992 and All That*.

[2] I agree with Freire (1970) and Apple (1982) that this is a rather limited view of the influence and capacities of ELT, but also feel that the two sides must 'agree to disagree' if progress is to be made in the other areas which Rogers highlights.

[3] The Structural Syllabus - basic units are the structures of the target language,   e.g. tenses, declarative, interrogatives, negatives.

[4] The Functional-Notional Syllabus - meaning and communicative capacity is the cornerstone of language learning,   e.g. the ability to apologize, to request.

[5] The Situational Syllabus - social situations are the basic motor of the syllabus, e.g.in the shop, at the post office.

[6] Communicative Approaches to the Syllabus - centred around communication (i.e. meaning, convention, appropriacy, interaction and structure).

[7] Difficulty Approaches to the Syllabus - easier things are taught first, more difficult things are taught later.

[8] The Linear Syllabus - content is sequenced one item after another.

[9] The Spiral Syllabus - the same item is returned to repeatedly and treated in more depth on each occasion.

[10] Utility Approaches to the Syllabus - based around what is needed, useful, and urgent for learners e.g. should they learn how to hold a telephone conversation first, or should they concentrate on managing transactions when shopping.

[11] Synthesis Approaches to the Syllabus - using Wilkins' (1976) terminology, this is the gradual accumulation of different parts of language taught separately and finally re-synthesized. (Allwright (1997) terms this *analysis*, however.)

[12] Analytical Approaches to the Syllabus - using Wilkins' (1976) terminology, this is the approximation of the learners' own linguistic behaviour, the language being presented in an unanalysed whole. (Allwright (1997) calls this *synthesis*).

[13] Thus, encountered language may *incubate* before learners can use it; learners may follow a *natural process* (including a *natural order*) in learning; they may have their own *personal agenda*; or, as Krashen (1981) in Allwright (1984)) suggests in his *Input Hypothesis*, Learning may rely on external exposure to language in comprehensible circumstances.

[14] My comments are based upon the '*Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*, published in 1972.

[15] EFL - English as a Foreign Language, which I feel operates more as a profit-making concern than ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching.