THE BALANCED CURRICULUM A POST-METHOD APPROACH TO LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Introduction

The Balanced Curriculum (TBC) is an *ideational* approach to syllabus and curriculum design that provides a framework for teachers and students to easily see the kinds of focus which are needed in order to learn a language. The central concept of TBC is that language learning and teaching are made up of different elements which should all be balanced.

TBC has two main elements, *input* and *output* which could broadly be referred to as the receptive and productive modes. These are then each subdivided by whether the activity is language-focused or fluency-focused (see Figure 1).

	Input (Receptive)	**Output (Productive)**
Building Language	1 Building knowledge *about* the language Awareness raising	2 Linking knowledge Accuracy focus
Building Fluency	3 Networking knowledge Comprehending input fluently	4 Experimenting with language Developing fluency

Figure 1: *The aims of the various aspects of The Balanced Curriculum*

In brief, the top half of TBC (Boxes 1 and 2) concerns either exposure to, or formally receiving, language knowledge and producing it correctly in controlled ways. The bottom half of TBC (Boxes 3 and 4) involves using the language that the student has limited (but sufficient) formal control over in *meaningful and communicative* ways with the aim of becoming more fluent at using it receptively and productively. Each of these boxes requires different activities or tasks and different mental processes to meet the learning objectives required for effective language acquisition. Let us look at each of the boxes in turn in more detail.

The top half (Boxes 1 and 2)

There is an essential difference between the top row and the bottom row in TBC. The aim of the two boxes at the top is to develop the student's knowledge of *new* (or *partially known*) knowledge *of,* or *about,* language items (Box 1) and to

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check them in controlled ways (Box 2). Box 1 might involve learning new (or learning more about partially known) words or language patterns from a grammar or vocabulary activity that focuses on the language used in a reading passage. The aim of work in this box would be to get more knowledge (input) about the feature. Work in Box 2 would require the student to determine if she actually could *use* (produce) the feature accurately. For example, the student may learn the difference in meaning between *lend* and *borrow* in Box 1, and demonstrate that she can accurately select the right one when called upon to produce it in a gap fill exercise (in Box 2) or a controlled writing activity. Thus in Box 2 there is an emphasis on *accuracy* rather than a requirement to use these items in communicative ways.

It is very important to notice that the knowledge of the language items (and the skills) learned in the top half is largely discrete and abstract knowledge *about* the target language. This is because in both these boxes this knowledge is largely gained within a single, or limited, textual and often non-communicative environment. The focus on the learning language forms and strategies is done in Box 1 by pulling a language feature out of a real communicative context and examining it in a detailed, but abstract, way. For example, the students may learn *about* the *present perfect tense*, *about* how to make negative tag questions, *about* the difference between *bring* and *take* and so on in Box 1. In Box 2, they try to demonstrate accurate *control* over the language they were exposed to in Box 1, by the use of a grammar drill, sentence completion task or other controlled language activities we find in grammar

and vocabulary books. The aim in Box 2 is to discover whether the knowledge learned in Box 1 is actually known and can be controlled. Thus the knowledge gained in Boxes 1 and 2 exists largely as separate and discrete knowledge *about* the language and how it works. An analogy would be knowing something about France, but never having been there.

The bottom half

The bottom half of TBC is about language *use*. The aim here is to receptively or productively practice language that is already known or partially known *but which students have limited fluent control over*. The aim of the lower half of TBC then is to have students access this language more fluently and become more automatic at using it. Thus the bottom half of TBC helps the student to see and use the various aspects of the language knowledge learned abstractly in the top half of TBC in meaningful contexts.

The aim of Box 3 is not to learn new language but to practice *already known language* in communicative ways. Box 3 is where Extensive Reading and Extensive Listening come into play where there is an emphasis on developing reading speed, building collocative knowledge, chunking language and generally getting a 'feel' for the language by reading or listening for pleasure for example. In Box 4 the students experiment with their language knowledge in communicative ways such as in free speaking activities, discussions and debates, essays, online chat, emails and so on. We will look at all these boxes in more detail later.

The following figure highlights some typical activities which may be done in each box.

	Input (Receptive)	Output (Productive)
Building Language	***Box 1 - The Formal Learning Box*** • Explicit teaching • Dictionary lookups • Studying from a grammar book • Intensive reading • Language awareness activities • Conscious word learning	***Box 2 - The "Getting Control" Box*** • Controlled language production activities • Language and pronunciation drills • Gap fill exercises • Memorized dialogs • Sentence completion tasks • Tests
Building Fluency	***Box 3 - The Fluency Input Box*** • Extensive reading • Extensive listening • Watching movies • Browsing the Internet • Listening to the radio or music	***Box 4 - The Fluency Output Box*** • 'Free' language production activities. • Casual conversations • Debates and discussions • Email, and online chat • Diary writing • Essays

Figure 2: *Some typical activities for each box in The Balanced Curriculum*

From discrete knowledge to fluency

TBC assumes that language knowledge starts its life somewhat separate and distinct from real communicative events because the learning is often done through instruction in language features and forms such as from grammar books and teacher explanations, dictionaries and so forth. Thus, in order to produce language, either in writing or speaking (the two right-side boxes), the student must pull together various pieces of discrete knowledge (learned and controlled in Boxes 1 and 2) to produce an utterance. So for example, the simple sentence *I went to Paris* requires the student to assemble, the correct words, the abstract knowledge of the correct word order, the appropriate verb form and tense, the appropriate preposition, the pronunciation and intonation or spelling, and so on.

Students can often talk *about* aspects of language using the appropriate metalanguage and are often able to explicitly state these discrete language rules. At the same time, this knowledge allows students to put language elements together. This active constructive process is not unlike how children play with *Lego*. When children play with Lego they can take pieces and put them together, then pull them apart and reformulate them into different constructions. The more often this is done, and the more opportunities students have to go through this active constructive process, the better and better they will get at putting chunks of language together.

Developing fluent control over these discretely learned forms is important because practice allows the students to

access language elements as ready-built chunks of language which obviates the need to construct every sentence from scratch, leading to more fluent communication. Thus the main aim of discrete language work in Boxes 1 and 2 is to provide the basis for fluent language use in Boxes 3 and 4.

This section has provided a relatively quick overview of what TBC is, but now it is necessary to see how TBC fits with how students learn language features. We shall return to a more in depth explanation of TBC boxes later.

The Balanced Curriculum and *The Cycle of Learning*

The section above has largely stated what students *need* or what a teachers *need to do* in a classroom and how each box has its own role in the big scheme of things. We will now turn to look at how students actually acquire language knowledge through conscious thought. *The Cycle of Learning* (Figure 3), assumes that knowledge is not learned in one go, but is built up over repeated exposures with each extra exposure adding a little bit more to the student's knowledge of a language item or skill.
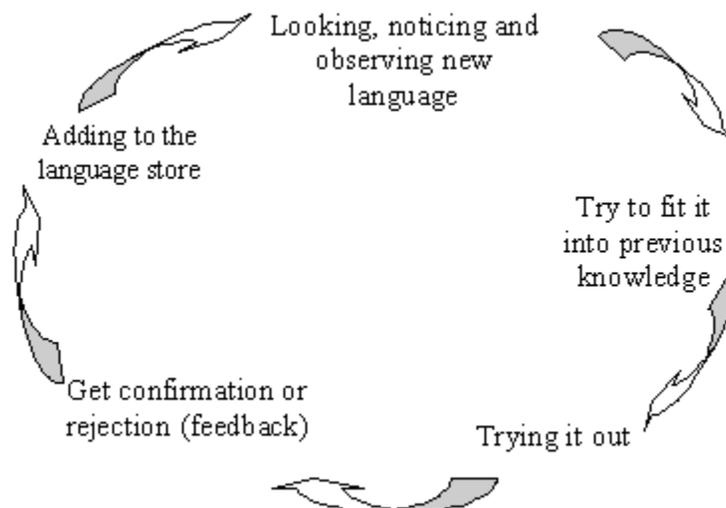
Figure 3: *The Cycle of Learning (adapted from Lewis 1993)*

Moreover, it assumes a strong role for conscious and attentive language learning of discrete language points. As young children are not mentally equipped to think like adults, TBC is thus most explanatory for language students in their early teens and above.

When students notice some new language in their input they will pay conscious attention to it. This could be a new word, a new grammar pattern or a new learning strategy, for example. The degree of noticing may involve a deep and concentrated analysis, or it may be slight depending on the task and need at hand. For example, they may notice some completely new information about a basic element of grammar such as the past tense form. Alternatively, they may make a mental note about something new they are learning about a language feature they already know. For example, the student may know the word *traffic* but may pick up a new collocation such as *traffic jam*, or a second meaning nuance such as *to traffic drugs*.

The amount of conscious attention expended will depend on what the student wishes to do. For example, if the student, who is reading extensively (she's in Box 3 mode), meets the unknown word *ancient* in the sentence *the ancient temple was in need of restoration*, the student may notice she does not know the word *ancient* but pay only limited attention to it and rely on the other words to keep comprehension flowing, and thus ignore it. Alternatively, she may halt her reading and pay more attention to it and try to work out the meaning (she'd be moving to Box 1 'formal study' mode). The student can do this by looking carefully at the context and using her linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge to guess the word's meaning. For example, she may guess that *ancient* incorrectly means *big*. However, and crucially, the student will not know if she *really* knows the word unless she looks in a dictionary, or tries it out in production in either a controlled environment (Box 2), or a freer one (Box 4).

So let's imagine our student has created a hypothesis that *ancient* means *big* and wishes to try it out in class (Box 4). So in class she says that yesterday she had **an ancient surprise*. Immediately the interlocutor will show non-comprehension which will give the student the feedback needed to reject the initial hypothesis and store her incorrect use in the language store (i.e. she now knows that *ancient* does *not* mean *big*). If the student wants to know the correct meaning, this feedback forces her to return to complete *The Cycle of Learning* on the first circuit by returning to the noticing stage again (Box 1) where she now knows she has to look for more clues or signals to the word's real meaning. The student then may find out from the

teacher or a dictionary (i.e. in Box 1 mode) that *ancient* actually means something like *old*. This is also added to the language store and raises a second hypothesis that *ancient* means *old*. If she then tries it out again in production (Box 2 or 4) with the sentence *At the party I met my ancient boyfriend* she again meets non-comprehension and will soon realize that *ancient* does not mean *old* in the sense of *previous*. The student's interlocutor may suggest that *ancient* is more likely to collocate with buildings than people (the student is thus learning more knowledge and is in Box 1 mode). In this way, the student now has to return to the noticing stage (Box 1 again) and will continue to go through *The Cycle* many times until she gets a more native-like awareness of how the word is used both receptively and productively. It is important to notice that the student is constantly moving from box to box, from moment to moment, in her search for a higher level of knowledge. Thus all boxes are needed to achieve this.

A teacher's understanding of the relationship between *The Balanced Curriculum* and *The Cycle of Learning* is crucial to an understanding of how language is learnt and how various tasks and activities need to be done at various stages to ensure a maximum return on the invested time and effort. In Box 1 the student notices and raises awareness of new language (or refines previous knowledge in light of feedback or new input) and then raises a new hypothesis to be tested. This testing can take place in a controlled environment (Box 2) or in a less controlled one (Box 4). The important point to note is that the student cannot be really sure if a language point has been internalized unless he or she has experimented with the language (Box 2 or

4) to see if it actually *works* in production. Staying only in a discrete and isolated passive knowledge state (staying in a state of Box 1 knowledge) will deny her the feedback she needs to find out if she can control a language item in a communicative, or even a controlled, linguistic environment.

We can therefore see that the experimental stage of *The Cycle of Learning* is crucial in allowing the student to get the feedback necessary that allows learning to develop. Without this feedback, the students will stay in a passive state of knowledge where the student cannot produce language in communicative events. In this way all elements of TBC in their relationship with *The Cycle of Learning* have their place in the big picture of language learning.

The function of each box in relation to *The Cycle of Learning*.

Let us now return to TBC and look at each box in detail to see how, each box is related to the others in terms of *The Cycle of Learning*. Before we do this it is necessarily to look at each box in detail.

Box 1 - The Formal Learning Box

Box 1 is the *Formal Learning Box* where language is being presented to learn. As we have seen this involves building *new* language knowledge or raising awareness of *partially-known* language, or by learning new reading skills. Typical activities could include teacher explanations (in L1 or L2); grammar or vocabulary explanations; learning vocabulary from lists or word cards; dictionary use; using self-study texts and working with genre and text-types (at the discourse-level). The knowledge the students build need not be restricted only to linguistic information from their reading and course books. It

may also include learning about various learning strategies such as learning how to use a dictionary, how to guess words successfully from context, or learning various reading skills.

One essential element of Box 1 is that the new information requires the students to notice the new language feature and to create new hypotheses about how it works or how it should fit their language learning systems. For example, elementary students will learn the word *chair* to describe the object used for sitting on, (new language). As they meet more language, perhaps at the late-intermediate level, they will discover that a less-frequent use of the word *chair* is as a verb to describe the action of running a meeting, (re-visiting language). As they learn more, the students may also learn more about the properties of the word *chair* and its collocations. For example, they may note that a *tall chair* is quite different from a *high-chair*, or a *push-chair*.

Box 2 - The 'Getting Control' Box

As we have seen, the function of the *Getting Control Box* is to practice new (and partially digested) language points in a controlled way to ensure new language is well known and can be used accurately. However, as was mentioned above, the knowledge still stays largely isolated as the practice is also discrete and tends to be done outside real communicative environments because work in this box tends to be contrived and analytical rather than for real communication. Another function of Box 2 is to check if the form and function of the new language is in fact known and to give the students chances to link language points learned in isolation in controlled ways. This will prepare them for being able to more accurately express what they want to say

when they are in a communicative situation.

Students have to link the knowledge learned in the *Formal Learning Box* (Box 1) to their existing knowledge and this is an essential part of going around *The Cycle of Learning*. This linking of knowledge helps cement language points into the existing language systems by making connections that had not been previously made in order to deepen and enrich the students' knowledge. For example, a student might test a hypothesis derived in the *Formal Learning Box* that *knee* is related to the verb *kneel*. Or she may try using the *present perfect* for (past) experience in sentences without *ago* as in *I have been to Paris*, where before she may have said **I have been to Paris three weeks ago*. Alternatively, she may do a vocabulary exercise to see if she does in fact know the difference between *give* and *take*.

This experimentation with language provides vital feedback on the success of learning in controlled production. It is important to note that while this experimentation is productive, it all the same remains in a highly controlled context with only enough co-text and context to allow for meaningful experimentation and (self-) assessment. Freer (non-deliberate/incidental) experimentation, along with fluency work will take place in Box 4. The students can get greater control by producing language to get feedback on the success of their language use in controlled and semi-controlled ways such as drills, grammar and vocabulary building exercises and so forth.

The types of activities in the *Getting Control* Box can range from highly controlled to less-controlled, and a range in between. Highly-controlled activities include a right-wrong gap fill exercise, or correcting a list of student errors or formal tests and are squarely placed in Box 2. Usually these activities have a right/wrong answer. These activities are aimed at assessing the productive accuracy of either the form (e.g. how to form negative questions in the *present continuous*) or meaning (e.g. deciding whether *made* or *do* should be used in a given context). Other activities might also include, meaningful drills, memorized dialogs, fill-the-blank gap fills, re-writing sentences, correcting errors, sentence manipulation activities, pronunciation practice, dictations, language puzzles and various types of tests. Less-controlled activities allow for more freedom to construct and experiment with meaning but within a limited range and may appear in Boxes 2 or 4 depending on how much of the task outcome has been decided in advance (the degree of task control).

The Fluency Boxes - 3 and 4

The bottom half of TBC aims to develop the student's fluency in language *use*. It is important to note that fluency is not restricted to advanced level students. Even beginner students can read simple sentences fluently after some practice and can produce some level of fluent production with a very limited knowledge of probably memorized sentence heads and chunks of ready-to-use language. Also, it is important to note that 'building fluency' does not mean expecting native-like use and should not be equated with performing as a 'fluent speaker' - meaning like a native speaker. 'Building fluency' is concerned with using or producing the language *one already has* more smoothly and without as much hesitation, and with more confidence than before.

This effort to become more fluent naturally will imply a movement from more controlled work activities in Box 1 (say, using a worksheet to learn how to guess unknown words successfully) to less control (actually doing it as they read extensively) in Box 3. The fluency aim for the elementary student thus is to improve text processing speed, and to internalize the guessing from context strategy and perform it in real time so well that it becomes automatic behaviour. If the student was not able to quickly work out the meaning of a new word there will be a breakdown in fluency and the student would have to return to a Box 1, or to a more controlled state, to work out the meaning. Thus, 'fluency' is relative depending on the ability and knowledge of the student and the task at hand.

As we have seen, Box 3 the *Fluency Input* box, is the place the students practice processing their reading and listening (receptive skills) fluently and smoothly. Example activities in Box 3 include Extensive reading; Extensive listening; watching movies, TV programs, documentaries and so on; listening to songs for pleasure; surfing the internet; reading emails and so on. One of the aims of work in this box it to build reading speed and automaticity of recognition of individual words so students can become good at networking their knowledge into chunks of language. By doing this they will build reading speed, listening fluency and word recognition automaticity. In Box 1 the students will have practiced some language elements and probably some reading skills (e.g. skimming, scanning, identifying topics from headlines, identifying theme etc.) but this does not guarantee that they can actually read a text fluently. Thus the role of Box

3 is to put into practice what they have learned in Boxes 1 and 2 from a reading (or listening) perspective.

If students can read text fluently at their own reading level (as in Extensive Reading) it will allow the students to notice connections between knowledge which had been previously learned in isolated and abstract and discrete ways. Moreover, by meeting massive amounts of comprehensible text (from their Extensive Reading and Extensive Listening) the students will be able to consolidate their knowledge learned in Boxes 1 and 2 through language recycling.

Beginners tend to process language word-by-word, but as they get better at reading and listening, they process language as chunks of related words as one unit. If they can recognize a whole string of words as a single chunk of language, it allows the student to process language as meaningful chunks that represent a single idea. By doing this, the student moves from word-by-word processing to idea-by-idea processing, which helps them to remember more of the text and thus become more effective readers and listeners. As we remember ideas much better than we remember actual words, this means the students will not only remember more of what they are reading or listening to, but they will also be more ready to re-tell it as they can remember what they read more easily. Moreover, by processing chunks of text, rather than having to assemble language from scratch, fewer processing demands will be placed on the student's working memory. Thus, faster processing of text also allows the student to free up memory resources, to relax and enjoy the text more, and concentrate on the plot, characterization or the message rather than just on decoding the language.

In order to pull together, or network, their knowledge into chunks of language, students should read and listen to graded or simplified materials while focusing on a global comprehension of the story without needing to think about the language too much. This is an essential part of the learning process because successful transfer of new language into long-term memory requires that the language be met several times (Waring and Takaki, 2003). The human brain is not designed to remember all the information it meets. It is only through encountering language items repeatedly in their learning that students are able to overcome the natural instinct to forget and retain new language in long-term memory.

Graded readers are ideal for both building fluency and ensuring that high-frequency items (lexical and grammatical) are met a sufficient number of times but only if the students read at their *comfort level*. Students should read at their comfort level until they become fluent and competent readers and listeners at that level. They then move on to the next level until they become smooth and fluent readers and listeners at that level and so on until they can read native materials. Similar parallels can be drawn with listening development.

To achieve these two aims, students need to meet a huge amount of easy text (such as from graded readers). It is *essential* in Box 3 that the text should be easy enough for them to process. If it is too difficult (with too many unknown words, or a complicated storyline for example) their reading speed will drop and they will have to revert to 'studying' language again as in the *Formal Learning Box* to find the meanings of words and phrases they do not know. For example,

they may need to look in a dictionary, ask the teacher and so on. In other words they will return to an intensive reading style. In this way we can see that putting students in front of a video of which they can understand very little, will be an exercise in frustration as the video will be just noise. They will not be able to latch onto any language element that they can analyze in Box 1 mode. Similarly, they cannot process the video fluently because they need a very large coverage of the surrounding text to be able to guess new word meanings from context. Research shows that this is around 95-98 percent of the co-text (Nation, 2001).

A further advantage of reading, or listening to, a large amount of text, is that it allows the student to see the language learned in Boxes 1 and 2 in meaningful contexts. This brings the language they have learned in the top half of TBC 'alive' so to speak, making the langauge seem more real than an object of 'study'. Moreover, it allows students to get a 'feel' for the language by noticing language patterns (e.g. grammar) collocations and colligations, text structure and so on that they may not have noticed before. In this way they can get a sense of what 'feels right' in a language which they cannot do from the limited input of a course book. We can thus see that the course book should be supplemented with large amounts of extensive reading and extensive listening.

From a *Cycle of Learning* perspective, Box 3 gives the students plenty of opportunities to meet massive amounts of text so they can notice features about the language they are meeting. In this way they can meet thousands of collocations and colligations, and learn to notice and eventually use, many of the sentence heads and sentence patterns that are

commonly found in English. For example, a beginner level student may meet the collocations *beautiful woman* and *handsome man* while reading a graded reader, and will subconsciously notice this pattern is the regular one. When the student wants to produce the collocation {*good-looking + person*} she has to decide if the appropriate word is *beautiful* or *handsome*. If she has met the collocation so many times, there is a strong likelihood that she will produce the correct one even though she may not know exactly why she chose it. She has therefore, in a sense, subconsciously learned that we do not say **beautiful man* or **handsome woman*. Thus one of the main functions of graded reading and listening in Box 3 is to give students the opportunity to get a *sense* or *feel* of how the language works in communicative and meaningful contexts and get a sense of appropriacy, register, and notice various types of genre.

All languages have tens of thousands of collocations and colligations and we simply do not have the class time to teach students what collocations and colligations are correct and appropriate for each word. Besides, doing so would be downright boring and we would have to rely on very dedicated students to learn collocations this way. The *only* way students can master the enormous number of collocations is through reading, or listening to, material at their comfort level i.e. graded reading. Learning these collocations and colligations is a vital part of the learning of a foreign language because if the students do not know the appropriate collocation, then they cannot use them in their own production and they will not sound natural. One of the hallmarks of native-like speech and writing is a solid command of collocation

and colligation. Therefore, graded reading is an *essential* and *indispensable* part of the generation of this knowledge.

Box 4 is the place to experiment with language that has been formally learned in Box 1 or somewhat less consciously in Box 3. Example activities in Box 4 include, free conversation practice; writing letters and emails; guided discussions; role-plays and simulations; debate / discussions; journal writing; essays; communicative games and online chat. The aim of Box 4 is to produce a smooth and steady flow of meaningful language without too much hesitation and without too much worry about making mistakes or errors. This should be done in an environment independent of explicit teacher or text support. As we saw from *The Cycle of Learning*, work in this box provides essential feedback on performance in non-controlled, more real-world environments. If there are no, or few, chances to experiment with the language in Box 4, *The Cycle of Learning* is broken because it does not allow the student opportunities for getting the vital feedback they need in order to test their hypotheses and see if they can actually use the language they have learned formally.

Developing output fluency is important if the students wish to know whether they can communicate in natural (out-of-class) ways and to gain confidence in producing coherent and cohesive text and with less anxiety. From a diagnostic perspective, fluency output practice in Box 4 provides the teacher with meaningful feedback on the students' fluency ability in a similar way that Box 2 provides feedback on accuracy of knowledge. If there is a breakdown in communication in Box 3 or Box 4, the students know to go back to Box 1 to get

more language knowledge, or to get more control over it in Box 2. Thus we can see that Boxes 2 and 4 help to pull together abstract and isolated knowledge through an active constructive process and help the students learn to communicate by communicating. They must also experiment with their language knowledge to achieve successful communication which is essential if they are to prepare for communication outside the classroom.

The role of the teacher

To make these things happen, teachers have to be flexible and responsive to the learning events as they unfold, moment by moment. This is because learning is a dynamic rather than a static activity. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the students get a full balance of activities and types of practice which should be *learning centered*. TBC assumes that students are not, by nature, independent and nor are they prepared for learning. The effective student is to some extent trained by the teacher, thus guidance and explanation are vital.

An over-emphasis in one box at the wrong time can delay, or even retard, language development. For example, in many teacher-fronted grammar-translation (or all form-focus) classrooms, the students spend most of their time in Box 1 with a little of Box 2 and almost no 3 and 4. This does not provide them with the necessary meaningful practice in processing text fluently, chunking, experimenting or developing their speaking or writing ability in natural communicative events. Thus even after many years of language 'study' they are often unable to hold even a basic conversation, or write a simple letter. The opposite can also occur. Students who are exposed to too much of Box 3 and 4, such as in a communicative language teaching situation where there is a de-emphasis on acquiring knowledge in Boxes 1 and 2, do not meet enough new language to improve their communicability. Therefore, they are unable to fluently express a message accurately, always having to settle with producing language within what they know.

The TBC boxes should not be seen as being divided by solid walls but rather as reflecting different types of attention and learning aims which allow the student and teacher to flow from one box to another as and when they need and *at any time*. This reflects the learning process. For instance, students may need / want a clarification of a grammatical / semantic meaning several times before that meaning can transfer to long-term memory. It is also important to note that a learning event may be taking place in more than one box at one moment in time. For example, a student focusing on a text intended for intensive reading may be guessing a new word from context. At some point in this activity the student must find an approximate meaning and put it back into the text (producing it in a sense) to replace the unknown word to see if it 'fits'. Similarly, a student completing a gap-fill exercise to check her knowledge of a type of vocabulary met in a reading may notice a new collocation, or phrase (a typical Box 1 activity). TBC thus accounts for, and responds where necessary to, the multi-tasking nature of language learning and provides teachers and students with a multi-dimensional framework that allows students to work on several things simultaneously even though there will usually be one central or main focus for any given activity.

TBC and methods

TBC does not espouse any particular method or approach to language teaching and learning but says that the approach should be principled while eclectic. TBC says that most methods work but only to achieve specific goals or aims. For example an 'input method' (e.g. Krashen, 1981) that emphasizes reading as a way to improve all language skills, is fine for developing and consolidating language but it does not give the student chances to look at and practice language explicitly and analytically. Nor does it give chances to experiment with language production and get vital feedback on performance. Thus the method is incomplete in and of itself.

Similarly, a 'grammar-translation method' emphasises Box 1 almost entirely and does not give the student chances to produce language fluently, nor to practice language in controlled ways to get the vital feedback need to know if something is know. An 'Audio-lingual' approach requires a lot of controlled drills and production, but often these are not done in meaningful contexts and very few opportunities are given to allow for fluency practice. As we saw in the previous section, too much emphasis on fluent production, as in a Communicative Approach, denies the student the vital access to more language input to learn from. Similar cases could be made for other approaches and methods.

Within the TBC framework we can see that all the above approaches and methods are fine *within* themselves but none of them are complete, or fully describe the language learning needs and process, on their own and none of them has all the four elements needed for balance. TBC does however, say that elements from each approach or method *must* be used for full language learning to take place and for the students to complete *The Cycle of Learning*. TBC says that the drills and form focussed language practice of Grammar-translation, or other form-focussed language work, is fine because it can give what is needed in Boxes 1. Aspects of Audiolingualism are also fine because they provide some of what is needed in Box 2. The 'reading method' is best suited for Box 3 work and communicative language teaching is well-suited for Box 4. Thus, TBC is a *post-method* way of approaching the language classroom and language learning. The teacher's job therefore is to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of each approach or method because an imbalance can lead to students not getting the right kinds of practice at the right time and at the right level.

Teachers all have their own methods and approaches that 'work' for them. Some teachers prefer Box 1 types of teacher controlled activities. Others prefer a more communicative 'hands off' environment. Some teachers do not like the rote memorization of vocabulary (even though research shows very clearly that this is a very powerful method of being introduced to a lot of new words very quickly). Similarly, some teachers do not assign reading. Not doing so denies the student of exposure to the massive amounts of text that are needed to meet new collocations and to consolidate the discrete knowledge learned in Boxes 1 and 2. Other teachers do not like to mark homework, but not doing this denies students their chance to get the feedback they need to go round *The Cycle of Learning*. Thus TBC suggests to these

teachers that that because balance is needed, there will be things that they may have to do that they do not like doing, all in the name of a greater good. Identifying and providing the appropriate balance, and meeting students' needs is the key.

TBC and Level

Clearly there does not need to be an equal amount of work happening all the time in each box because that would depend heavily on the students' level. Beginners for example, have so little language that asking them to produce fluent text in Box 4, or listen to a news broadcast is an exercise in frustration. Therefore, necessarily there would be more and more Box 1 and Box 2 work at this level. Intermediates by contrast would probably have mastered the basics of the language but will not be very fluent. So at this level there would be a relative emphasis on fluency work in Boxes 3 and 4 to consolidate the basics and allow for the largely discrete language knowledge gained from Boxes 1 and 2 to be used fluently even with mistakes and inappropriate forms from time to time. Thus at this level there would be a de-emphasis on formal analytical learning. At the Advanced level, students would be fluent enough to say what they wanted but would need exposure to massive amounts of text to get a feel for collocation and colligation so they can more accurately say what they wanted to. This could be done through extensive reading and listening which would help build a good command of collocations and fluency. It is essential though to remember that the emphasis at different ability levels is relative and not absolute. At all levels there should be an attempt to work with all the boxes.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of *The Balanced Curriculum*. The ideational framework is just that - ideational, but nevertheless it provides a framework within which teachers, students, curriculum and syllabus planners and coursebook writers can both easily work out what is missing from their curriculum or syllabus and respond to them by providing the appropriate balance. TBC works at several levels. Firstly, it can guide teachers in the preparation of a single class or lesson to ensure there is balance. Secondly, it can be used to ascertain whether there is sufficient balance within a single course. Thirdly, it can help to determine whether there is sufficient balance within a school's curriculum.

As TBC is post-method, at the class or task level TBC can be a useful guide for teachers to know what should be done next in order for language learning to move forward. For example, if in a fluency speaking activity the teacher discovers that the students are unable to communicate because they do not have the required language or forms, she knows that the students must return to Box 1 to get that knowledge and then move to Box 2 to practice it in controlled ways. After this is done the teacher can return to the original activity. Similarly, if a teacher notices that an advanced student is having troubles with producing native-like forms, the teacher can assign Box 3 work to build fluency, consolidation and exposure to collocations and other aspects of language.

TBC can also be a very useful mnemonic for teacher trainers. The essential elements of TBC can be picked up relatively quickly by way of the

diagram (Figure 1). The main advantage of using TBC in teacher training is that it provides a complete and clear way of understanding, from an ideational perspective, of how the various elements of language learning and teaching complement each other, and shows how an imbalance can be identified and rectified. It also explains how the various methods and approaches complement each other and at the same time suggests appropriate teacher and student roles needed to provide balance. TBC also provides a framework within which the role of conscious learning, the need for both receptive and productive practice, the need for formal and informal language learning, and the role of implicit and explicit language knowledge can be housed.

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TÓM TẮT

CHƯƠNG TRÌNH ĐÀO TẠO CÂN BẰNG - CÁCH TIẾP CẬN THỜI ĐẠI HẬU PHƯƠNG PHÁP ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC DẠY VÀ HỌC NGÔN NGỮ

Bài báo này giới thiệu khái niệm Chương trình cân bằng và phân tích các đặc điểm của chương trình này. Đây là khung chương trình mang tính chất lý tưởng nhưng dễ sử dụng và giúp giáo viên, người học và các tác giả giáo trình nhận diện các yếu tố còn thiếu trong chương trình giảng dạy. Bài báo tập trung miêu tả các thành phần của Khung chương trình cân bằng và mối quan hệ giữa Khung chương trình này với Vòng tròn học tập. Các yếu tố về trình độ người học, phương pháp giảng dạy của giáo viên cũng được đề cập trong bài báo.