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ABSTRACT

The process of revising the second language curriculum in a Japanese postsecondary vocational school is described, focusing on the collaborative approach taken. The school provides second language instruction and vocational training in several occupational areas. A number of research teams or "focus groups" were established, each with a clear statement of purpose and goals. The subsequent curriculum renewal process has three phases. In the first, 16 faculty and administrators in three focus groups developed a mission statement and philosophy for the institution, conducted a needs assessment among students, faculty, employers, and high schools, and developed goals and exit-level objectives for each program level. In the second phase, focus groups collated information on research and practice in various aspects of the language curriculum. In the third phase, four focus groups will work on development of curriculum evaluation instruments, faculty evaluation and development needs, provision of teacher and student resources, and student assessment. Lessons learned during the first two phases concern the need for effective communication, curriculum renewal as an opportunity for staff professional development, the role of consultants, and the need to establish realistic schedules. Problems occurring in a situation in which language and content instruction are provided in separate programs are discussed. (MSE)

COLLABORATIVE CURRICULUM RENEWAL IN A TERTIARY VOCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN JAPAN

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Introduction

There are many different ways of describing curricula. One such way is to place each curriculum on a continuum according to the degree of centralisation inherent in design and implementation. At one extreme is a totally centralised curriculum in which all decision making is remote from the classroom; those involved in the work of the classroom - the teachers and the learners - despite their central role in curriculum implementation, have little if any influence on curriculum design.

A centralised approach to curriculum innovation has, therefore, often meant that important decisions concerning, for example, programme objectives, materials or methodology, are taken long before the teacher and learner start to interact. Such an approach, however, may produce overt or covert resistance on the part of classroom practitioners, which in turn may lead to a disparity between what curriculum planners, administrators and materials writers plan to happen and what actually occurs in the classroom.

At the other end of the continuum would be a collaborative approach where all participants in the renewal process are consulted and asked to share their experience, views and concerns so that these can be incorporated in both process and product, and they themselves can

develop professionally. In other words, a curriculum design which is informed by those who will implement the design.

Nunan (1992), in his description of an experiment where teachers had a central role in the process of curriculum renewal, goes further, stating how a collaborative approach necessitates attending to information coming from a wide variety of sources:

> " . . . curriculum developers need to take account of and respond to data coming from classroom researchers, second language acquisition researchers, test and evaluation specialists, funding authorities, learners, teachers and so on. " (p. 230)

The need to ensure that curriculum design fits the context in which it is to be implemented, provides a powerful argument for drawing upon the collective experience of the individuals within an institution. Such a procedure can provide insights at specific moments in the process - during the formulation of exit level objectives, for example. In addition, where an action research approach is adopted, information can be obtained and used during the whole renewal process.

White describes this approach as the "problem-solving model" (1988, pp. 123-125.) and also emphasises the importance of taking into account the local context where the innovation is to occur. Holliday (1992) provides an example of how the role of classroom practitioners can be "that of primary researcher and developer." (p. 419)

There have been few documented accounts of curriculum renewal which are genuinely collaborative and decentralised; exceptions are, for example, Clark (1987) and Nunan (1992). The purpose of this paper is thus firstly to provide a case study of a collaborative model of introducing curriculum innovation, as viewed at an interim stage in the

process - the end of the second phase; secondly it aims to give an indication of how learner-centred tasks may provide a unifying link between the language and vocational content sides of the curriculum.

The curriculum renewal setting

This section describes the institution where the curriculum renewal is occurring and the factors that have led to the initiation of the process.

Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages (KIFL) is a tertiary level vocational institution in Tokyo, providing skills training in the occupational areas of banking and international business, travel (airline related work, tour guide and hotel work) secretarial training and office automation. In addition, it provides language training (mainly English but also French, German, Spanish and Chinese)

Currently, 80% of the annual student intake of 1,800 is female, 20% male, although recently this latter percentage has been increasing slowly. The continuing education programme provides further training for about 1,600 adult learners.

The following table provides information on the KIFL faculty.

Table 1 - The KIFL Faculty

	Full time	Part time
Japanese	19	115
Expatriate	92	19
Total	111	134

Administration staff number approximately 90.

The need for change was generally accepted by institution staff prior to the inception of the project - essential if innovation is to succeed. (See, for example, Straker Cook, 1987, pp. 17-24, and White, 1988, pp.136-147 for discussion of the problems involved in effecting curriculum change.) All members of the institution had been involved in providing information and opinions to consultants, who had been invited to examine and comment on the current state of the institution and to propose plans for perceived necessary changes. Staff had also been given the opportunity to comment on the recommendations of the consultancy reports.

In response to the perceived need for change, a curriculum working group consisting of members from within the institution had been established to look into opportunities for course development, materials writing, and professional development.

Finally, tertiary level institutions in Japan are being prompted by the declining school age population to review the content and manner of delivery of the courses they offer, in order to continue to attract students.

The curriculum renewal structure

In this section, the various phases in the curriculum renewal process are described.

Overall framework

A series of research teams or 'focus groups' was established, each with a clearly defined statement of purpose and set of goals and outcomes. (See Appendix A for an example of a complete brief for one of these research teams.) The aim of such a framework was to create a solid

foundation for the curriculum innovation by combining the knowledge and experience of the faculty and administration with an increasing awareness of current research.

Phase 1

Sixteen faculty and administration members were involved in the three initial focus groups of the first phase which was planned to last one semester. Group 1 developed a mission statement and philosophy for the institution, while the second group targetted students, faculty members, employers and high schools in order to obtain information on the needs and aspirations of students. The third focus group developed a set of goals and exit level objectives for each level of the programme.

The process was seen as a series of overlapping circles rather than being linear, however; the idea of recursion was recognized as being important, as was the idea of group inter-dependence and the dynamic that this produced. Information obtained by the needs analysis research team, for example, while of immediate use to the goals and objectives group, was also used to retrospectively modify the text of the philosophy and mission statement. In addition, information from subsequent needs surveys was used to re-examine goals and exit competencies. A further example would be how the process of specifying exit competencies has resulted in re-examining and amending certain curriculum goals. Formative evaluation of previously accomplished work is central to the whole process.

Phase 2

The second phase research teams investigated and collated current research and practice in various areas of the curriculum: vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, speaking, writing, learner styles and strategies, learning content, discourse and pragmatics. The outcome of each of the groups was an annotated bibliography, a typology of teaching and learning task types and a professional development package for use within the institution. 35 faculty and administration members were given three hours a week release time so that they could participate in this phase, which lasted one semester.

Phase 3

Four other focus groups will continue or start work in the third phase of the project.

Development of instruments for the evaluation of the whole curriculum renewal process, as well as of specific elements such as courses and materials which may be developed, will be carried out by the programme evaluation team.

The professional development group will examine the area of teacher appraisal - including self and peer evaluation; it will also be looking at ways of enhancing the provision of formal and non-formal teacher development.

One research team will be looking at the current provision of resources both for students and teachers in order to make suggestions for improvement and addition.

The work of the learner assessment group will continue throughout the lifetime of the project. They will be designing, piloting and

implementing instruments for assessing students during their course of study at the Institute.

A significant amount of knowledge has been collected by the project; this will now be used by future teams during the development of syllabus specifications, course and materials plans, unit flowcharts and learning tasks.

Figure 1 gives a schematic representation of the relationship between the different groups.

Figure 1

Lessons learned during the first two project phases

The need for effective communication

Although communication is generally recognised as being a key factor in achieving successful curriculum innovation, (see, for example, Bowers, 1987, pp.4-6; White, 1988, pp.138-139.) this has, however, not always been effected from the outset of a project. Wilson and Harrison (1983), for example, describe how communication and involvement occurred almost fortuitously in a curriculum development project in Africa: "not only can trialling serve as a convenient vehicle for publicising at all levels the aims and strategies of the project, but also . . . it can provide an opportunity for large numbers of key local officials . . . to become an integral part of the operation."

In contrast, the establishment of a steering committee was an early communication measure adopted by the KIFL project; this is made up of

representatives from different sections of the faculty and administration and meets twice per semester. The two-way dialogue between project management and the different sections of the institution was intended to avoid any problem becoming a confrontational block to successful innovation.

A second link between management and the faculty is the post of teacher liaison officer, which was created to enable faculty concerns about the project to be more directly heard and discussed.

Communication of information was also done through the 'Project Bulletin' which is issued in English and Japanese to all institution members. The gradually increasing enthusiasm for the work of the project has resulted in the editing of this being taken on by the faculty.

Work produced in draft form by each of the groups was circulated, both for information and for evaluative comment. Feedback was received in varying quantities, but this was discussed and incorporated as far as possible into the ongoing work of the different teams - the institution was made aware of this process in order to encourage wider participation. It is less easy to assess the information dissemination value of the process, since varying reports were received by the teacher liaison officer, ranging from positive comments about the openness of the renewal process to complaints about the lack of time available to comment meaningfully.

The findings of the research teams were presented in workshop format to the institution in order firstly to create a two-way dialogue which would enrich the work of the group. Professional development was the second important purpose of the presentations.

In response to the expressed concern that despite growing enthusiasm, a number of non-participating personnel were beginning to develop negative feelings, individual group members addressed individual faculty members in order to discuss ongoing work and to obtain ideas and suggestions. This measure had varying success since much depended upon the energies of individual research team members.

Professional Development

An important benefit of a collaborative approach to curriculum renewal is the professional development opportunity it provides. The skills and knowledge that have been acquired by the institution and by individual members through participation in research groups, or at workshop presentation, is a benefit that would not have been gained with a more centralised approach to curriculum renewal.

The role of external consultants.

The consultants from outside the institution do not claim to have knowledge or experience of the learning, cultural and administrative contexts obtaining in Japan and specifically in KIFL and other similar tertiary institutions. Only institution members can give this information. In addition to adding 'value', even 'prestige' to the renewal, and stimulating interst in the faculty, external consultants have provided guidelines for the renewal process, given seminars on the theoretical and practical aspects of curriculum innovation, provided professional support and management of the different components of the project The renewal is thus seen as a partnership between the institution as a whole and the

curriculum development consultants which White (1988) in his discussion of strategies of innovation, refers to as the "normative-re-educative model." (pp. 126-133)

The need to establish realistic schedules

Ensuring the completion of the work of the research teams has been one of the main problems encountered during the first two phases of the project. The planning stages of a collaborative curriculum renewal project needs to take into account the demands that such an approach makes on the personnel involved, together with the steep learning curve that may initially occur.

Language and content

This section describes the problems that exist in an institution where language training and content training are provided in separate programmes and offers the notion of task as a syllabus unit as a possible solution to these problems.

. KIFL, in common with other similar institutions, has two divisions: language training, staffed mainly but not exclusively by expatriates, and vocational content training which is taught, mainly in Japanese, by Japanese staff. There has been minimal contact between the two sections.

Initially at least, a potential way of ceating a bridge between the two sections was to use those faculty members involved in the area of English for Occupational Purposes. I would argue, however, that this seems to be the wrong way to approach the problem. Such a strategy would not in fact help to create the unity that the institution wants and

needs. One of the effects of curriculum innovation is that different sections of the community may feel threatened in some way - because of ideological standpoints, because power positions are seen as being undermined or simply because of worry about the future and things new. It is argued that to use the concept of task as a basis for syllabus design, would help to provide both useful instruction and also a means of ensuring that provision is made for the different teaching styles and concerns that exist in an institution such as KIFL as well as helping to allay fears about the new curriculum.

Long and Crookes (1992) provide a detailed rationale for task-based language teaching and a review of the literature of syllabus design and second language acquisition research. In common with Nunan (1988b) they make a distinction between "real-world target tasks." which are defined as "the things people *do* in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between." and pedagogic tasks which they define as being "derived from the (target) task types" and as "increasingly complex approximations to the target tasks." (p44)

The necessary identification of learner needs in terms of the target tasks that learners will engage in after their course of study, is nearly complete; from these will be developed the pedagogic tasks that will form the basis of the interaction between learner and teacher in the classroom. The humanistic dimension of learner aspirations and preferred learning styles will have to be taken into consideration at this stage. The criteria for sequencing still needs to be finalised but will be based on context-based criteria such as theme, rather than more narrow linguistic-based criteria such as syntactic complexity.

How will this help to draw together the two sides of the institution and the division between language and content? An illustration of a putative task might serve to clarify the issue.

A real-world task that the learner could well be involved in after graduation, would be as a hotel receptionist, helping a foreign guest take a taxi to a particular location. A number of pedagogic tasks would be involved in achieving this task objective.

On the language side, there would be a series of enabling tasks - selective listening, for example, involving video or audio input where the learner would listen for the nature of the request. Dealing with written text could be focussed on by use of a map, for example, and written directions. There could be a focus on form - either in the classroom or in an independent learning centre. The possible computer resource would also be used for vocabulary work which could also be worked on in the classroom. Speaking practice could be given through role play.

On the vocational content side, there would be pedagogic tasks focussing on how to deal with customers in general - whether in Japanese or in English. Since appropriate language (dependent on the superior, equal or inferior status of the interlocutor) is very important in Japanese culture, this component would most certainly need to be included in work on the task. The different aspects of hotel work and the duties of the post of receptionist would also need to be dealt with by the vocational studies programme.

In this way, the task would allow teachers to contribute as a team in different but appropriate ways to the curriculum goal of helping students perform language tasks as they will be expected to perform in

similar tasks in the workplace. We would, I feel, be deluding ourselves if we expect individual teaching approaches to change radically or Japanese society in general to view, for example, discrete point testing with less importance. Curriculum renewal must expose practitioners to a variety of teaching and learning approaches and to the research and rationale behind these approaches - and must help them to evaluate these approaches. The realities of the situation must also be taken into account so that the gap between what is intended and what actually occurs in the classroom does not become too great.

Such an approach would reflect current research in syllabus design, would allow for a flexible modular approach, and, most important in collaborative curriculum renewal, would help to ensure that the varied contributions that the faculty can make, are complementary rather than unrelated or even divergent.

Summary

This paper has described the theoretical perspective underpinning the approach to curriculum innovation adopted by the KIFL curriculum renewal project. I have further described the processes that have been undertaken in order to try to realize the theoretical model adopted. In addition, I have tried to emphasize the central position given to proven and successful classroom practice. Some of the problems encountered during the first six months of the project have been discussed as well as the solutions adopted. I have put forward the idea that taking task as a unit of analysis would be a possible solution to the lack of unity in the

institution, and a way of relating the language syllabus to the content syllabus.

The future development of the project - the specification of learner centred tasks, the reorganisation of programmes, the development of courses and materials, the conducting of seminars and workshops, will, however, continue in the spirit summarised by Clark (1987):

> ". . . a democratic framework of shared responsibilities is essential rather than a simple hierarchical structure." (p. 136.)

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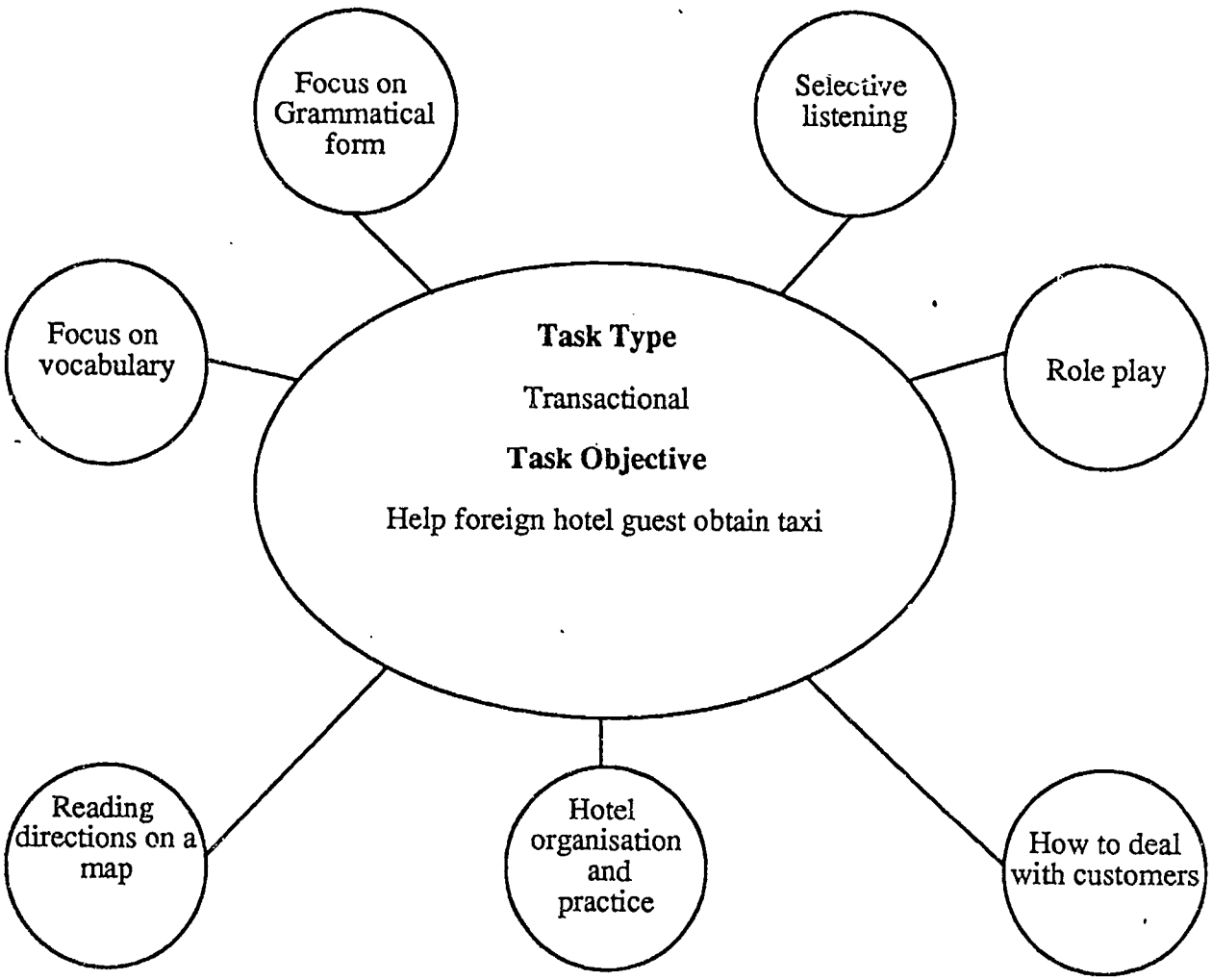
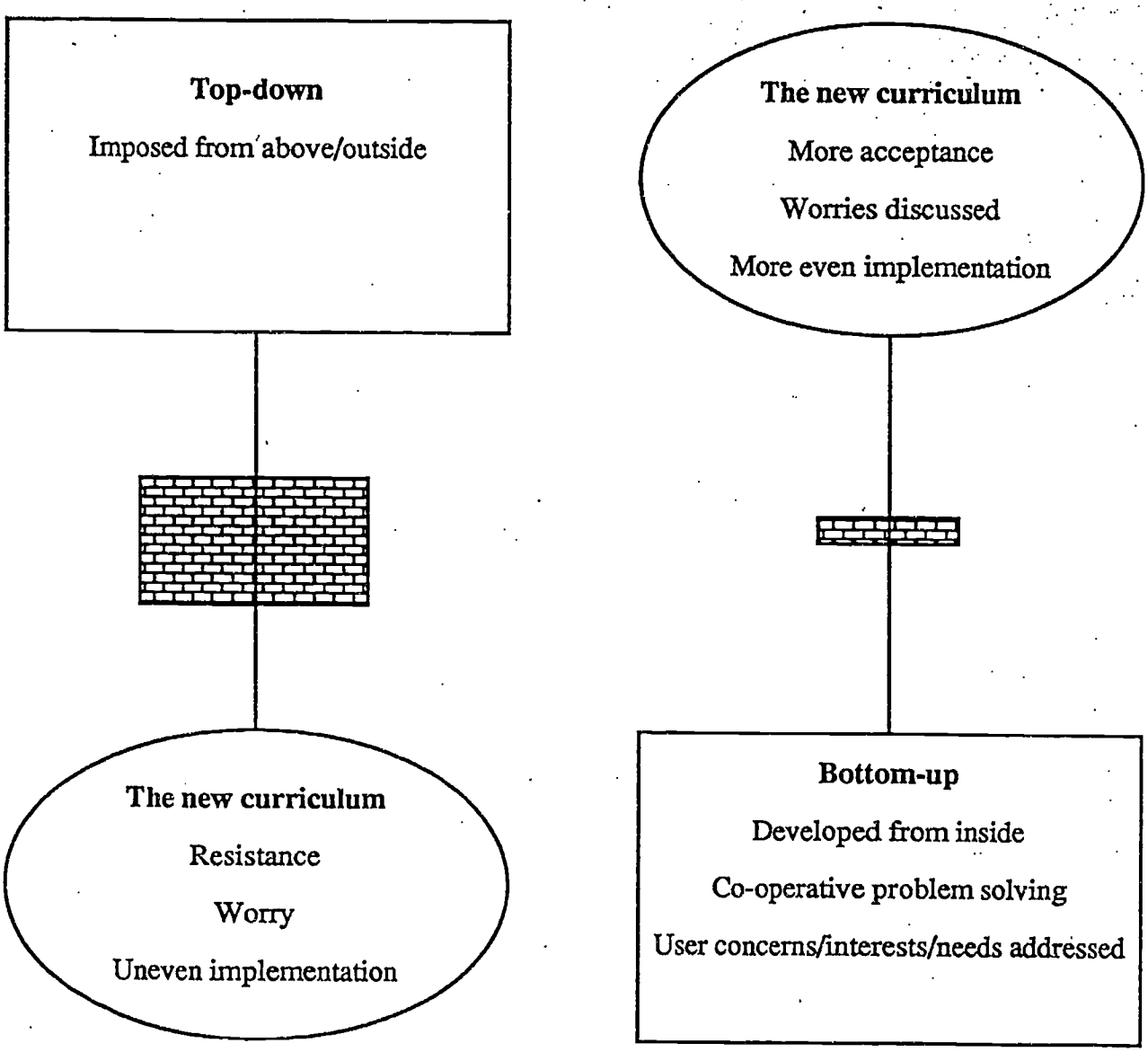

Focus on Grammatical form
Selective listening
Focus on vocabulary
Task Type
Transactional
Task Objective
Help foreign hotel guest obtain taxi
Role play
Reading directions on a map
Hotel organisation and practice
How to deal with customers



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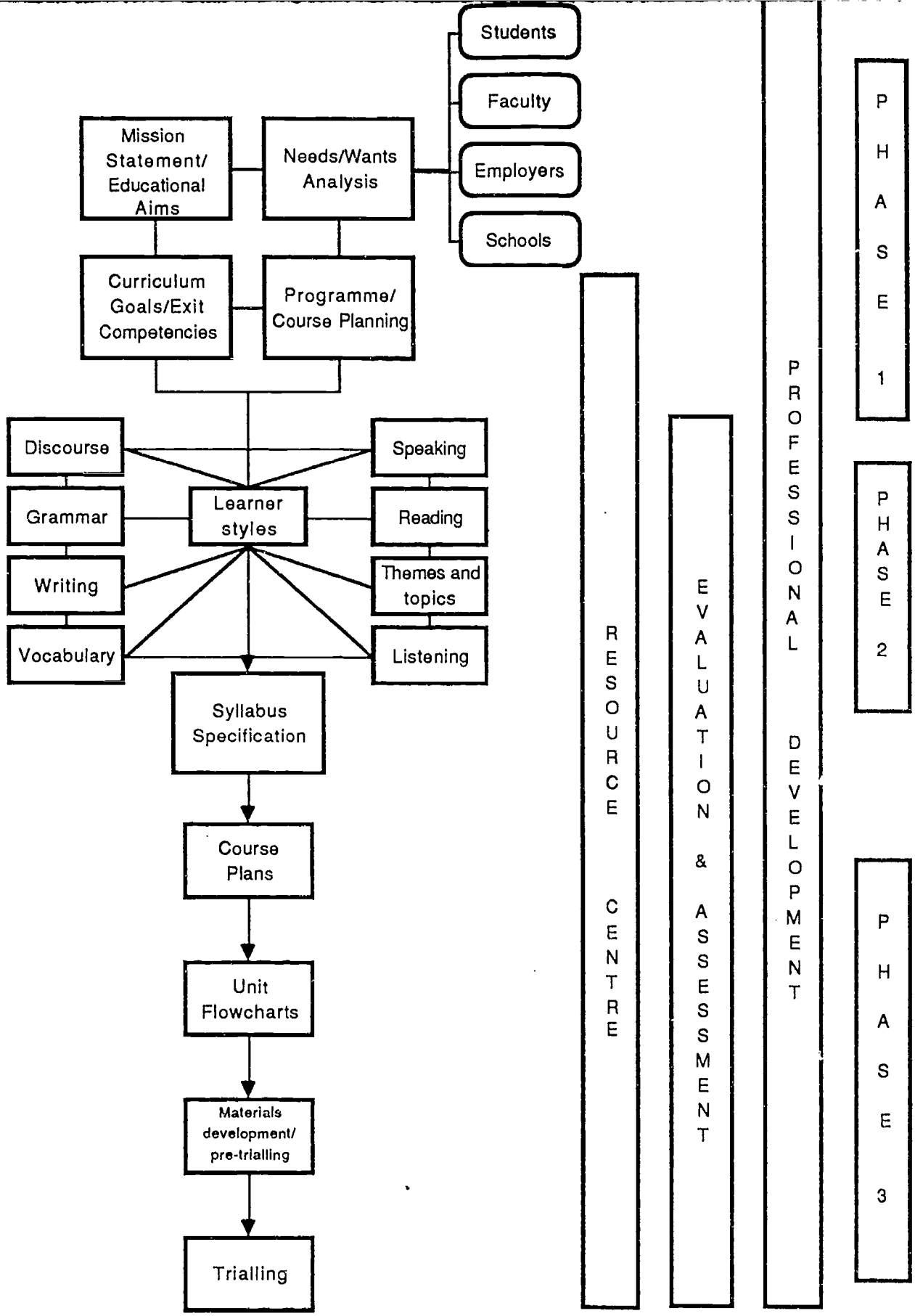
Students
Faculty
Employers
Schools
Mission Statement/ Educational Aims
Needs/Wants Analysis
Curriculum Goals/Exit Competencies
Programme/ Course Planning
Discourse
Speaking
Grammar
Learner styles
Reading
Writing
Themes and topics
Vocabulary
Listening
Syllabus Specification
Course Plans
Unit Flowcharts
Materials development/ pre-trialling
Trialling
RESOURCE CENTRE
EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
PHASE 1
PHASE 2
PHASE 3

Figure 1