Nunan, D. (1993) Task-based syllabus design: Selecting, grading and sequencing tasks. In G. Crookes and S. Gass (1993b).

Omaggio Hadley, A. (1993) *Teaching Language in Context* (2nd edition). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Schiffman, S.S., Reynolds, M.L. and Young, F.W. (1981) *Introduction to Multidimensional Scaling.* Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Shohamy, E. (1984) Does the testing method make a difference? The case of reading comprehension. *Language Testing,* 1: 147–70.

Shohamy, E. (1988) A proposed framework for testing the oral language of second/foreign language learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 10: 165–79.

Skehan, P. (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Snow, R.E., Kyllonen, P.C. and Marshale, B. (1984) The topography of ability and learning correlations. In R.J. Sternberg (ed.) *Advances in the Psychology of Human Intelligence* (pp. 47–103). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Stansfield, C. (1996) *Test Development Handbook: Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI).* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Underhill, N. (1987) *Testing Spoken Language: A Handbook of Oral Testing Techniques.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Van Lier, L. (1989) Reeling, writhing, drawing, stretching, and fainting in coils: Oral proficiency interviews as conversation. *TESOL Quarterly,* 23: 489–508.

Widdowson, H.G. (1978) *Teaching Language as Communication.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wigglesworth, G. (1997) An investigation of planning time and proficiency level on oral test discourse. *Language Testing,* 14: 85–106.

Willis, J. (1996) *A Framework for Task-based Learning.* London: Longman.

Young, F.W. and Harris, D.F. (1992) Multidimensional scaling. In *SPSS for Windows Professional Statistics, Release 5* (pp. 157–223). Chicago, IL: SPSS Inc.

Afterword: Taking the Curriculum to Task[1]

Christopher N. Candlin

I INTRODUCTORY

The purpose of this edited collection of commissioned papers in the *Applied Linguistics and Language Study Series* has been to provide multiple perspectives on the construct of *task,* drawing on those themes which have had a continuing impact on language education: tasks in relation to teaching, tasks in relation to learning, and tasks in relation to testing. The Introduction to the volume sets out clearly the dimensions of this impact, and how tasks, in their varying interpretations by the participants in these perspectives, teachers, researchers and testers, have been equally variably defined and interpreted. The original papers collected here have engaged themselves with a range of relevant issues surrounding the construct: task definition, the question of the pedagogic validity of tasks in terms of classroom operationalisation, the orientation of tasks to the learner, and the learning validity of tasks in terms of their focus on purpose, form and meaning in classroom interaction, and the potential of tasks as a means of assessing learner performance. All of the papers are grounded in research, make use of a range of methodologies, and are located in a broad set of research sites.

Given the clarity of these papers and the associated editorial apparatus in this collection, it would be otiose in this Afterword to re-canvass their perspectives, and those of other writers cited here, with their distinctive positions on the nature, utility and significance of tasks. In saying so I do not deflect from the spirit of the Introduction in emphasising the point made there that researching language pedagogy is a very long-term project, and no single book can hope to make more than a small contribution to the field. Nonetheless, as those authors in the collection concerned with language learning tasks I co-edited with Dermot Murphy in 1987 also felt (Candlin and Murphy, 1987), it was important then to make a start, and now, thanks to the ensuing wide-reaching research (for some references, see Nunan, 1989, 1991; Crookes and Gass, 1993a, 1993b) and, especially, the innovative contributions collected in this volume, we are much beyond that point.

What I can do here is to return to the spirit of speculation characteristic of that early contribution in 1987. I make no apology for this commitment to

speculation. While it is natural to speculate at the outset of enterprises, it is also important to continue to do so, especially when we are some way along the route, if only to check our compasses, as it were, and resight some of our objectives.

What is noticeable about the relatively short history of research into tasks in the context of second language acquisition and pedagogy is how little attention, proportionately speaking, has been devoted to exploring in detail the question of the role that tasks might play beyond the confines of the classroom or other learning environment, in the overall design and construction of an institutionalised language educational curriculum *in macro*, as, for example, in a public secondary or primary school system. By *curriculum* here I am referring, in the more European sense, to the complex of established and ratified guidelines and syllabuses, statements of contents, aims and goals, suggested resources, assessment schemes and systems, modes and models of teaching, in short, whatever is set out, more or less formally, as an approved and legitimated guide to enable, but also to constrain, practices in educational institutions in schooling. This comparative lack of attention to tasks within language education in the context of educational systems is perhaps strange, given that the construct of task has a long history in curriculum theory, stretching back at least to the work of Dewey (1933, 1938) in the United States and that of Stenhouse (1975) in the United Kingdom.

This is not to say that tasks have been ignored as key elements in language pedagogy as a means of structuring thematic content and learner activity, as in the design of curriculum materials (Candlin and Edelhoff, 1982), or as a means of facilitating learner–learner and learner–teacher interaction in the classroom, emphasising both interactional and affective dimensions of communication (Legutke and Thomas, 1991); or as a basis for classroom-level curriculum planning (Prabhu, 1987); or as a means for enhancing experiential learning (Kohonen et al., 2000); or as a stimulus for exploring so-called *contingency* in learners' and teachers' actions (van Lier, 1996) *inter alia*. Indeed, it is most obviously now the case, that writers and publishers of language teaching textbooks have extensively seized on the construct of task as a useful tool for the internal organisation of textbook pedagogic content (Nunan, 1989); in fact, they have gone further and have elevated it to the status of a methodology, fashioning it into the core component of so-called 'task-based (language) learning', which has relatively recently appeared as a kind of latter-day sub-variant of the communicative curriculum (Breen and Candlin, 1980) with a special focus, however, on learners' actions and processes in the classroom. Further, if the role of tasks within the curriculum *in macro* has been under-explored and under-researched, this is also true, though to a lesser extent, in relation to the place and role of tasks in the systematic and sequenced organisation of classroom practice, the curriculum *in micro* as it were, despite the emphasis on task-related classroom-focused research such as that presented in some of the papers in this collection.

In what follows, then, I would like to indicate some of the ways in which this recourse to task, when institutionalised and established within the school

curriculum *in macro*, and when drawn upon by teachers *in micro* in their classes, has implications for future emphases and directions in the design and conduct of task-related language acquisitional and language educational research, its questions and its processes. In brief, I want to ask what future research implications might arise from a curriculum and classroom commitment to an engagement with tasks, especially where curriculum and classroom practices in the institutionalised contexts I have indicated have not, by and large, been much influenced so far by the outcomes of task-focused research.

Addressing this issue turns out to be much more difficult than one might think, principally because as far as the matter of placing task as a central construct within the language educational curriculum *in macro* is concerned, there are few examples to my knowledge to which one can refer in the public educational sector. Some examples one can turn to, and ones with which I am personally familiar, are present in, and others alluded to, in a very recent book edited by Breen and Littlejohn (2000), in particular the pioneering and long-standing work in Catalonia by Ramon Ribe and his colleagues (Ribe, 1994, 2000), or by Pnina Linder in the narrower organisational context of the *kibbutzim* schools in Israel (Linder, 2000). I should say that I am excluding here the utilisation and evaluation of tasks in programmes specifically designed and organised for particular user groups, as for example in ESP or LSP programmes. I do so because it seems to me that the commitment of special purpose language teaching to authentication in terms set by external sponsors and their understandings of target behaviours has, to an extent, taken over and absorbed the construct of task from the needs analytical focus of such curricula on what its audiences *do*, in communicative terms, and has led course planners to identify tasks as a way of emulating, simulating and authenticating that work-related activity, rather than espousing the construct as a central design principle because of its perceived socio-cognitive, and more generally educational, orientation and value. Nor am I suggesting, in my reference above to the lack of underpinning research, that those experimental studies involving tasks with small and selective groups, as classically presented in this volume, will not be potentially of considerable value for the design and articulation of curriculum and classroom practices based on their results. Even less am I suggesting in saying this that the sole arbiter of research into language tasks should be the issue of its direct utility or applicability to language education curriculum design and the conduct of classroom activities. Nonetheless, whether explicitly stated or not, it would be jejeune to assume that researchers into tasks, whether from a discourse analytical, SLA or language assessment perspective, are not in part driven by some sense of applicability to those macro and micro curriculum contexts. And, in any case, whether they do or do not, curriculum specialists, administrators and teachers will, in their view quite rightly, look to such research for inspiration or for a warrant, and will wish to draw upon it in their practices. The force of this desire, especially in the climate of popular interest in the construct of task, is to raise the question that there is more than ever an important need

now to focus on institutionalised practices in language education and their relationship to research results and research planning.

II TASKS AND THE CURRICULUM

As it happens, one key example case of my focus on institutionalised practices is provided by current initiatives and developments in language education in Hong Kong. Let me provide some background. A so-called *Target-Oriented Curriculum* (TOC) has, after a considerable period of discussion and, indeed, ongoing debate, been introduced by the Education Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government in selected primary schools in Hong Kong (though its inception preceded the changeover of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997). The TOC has particular relevance to the language studies curriculum, English and Chinese, and has been introduced at primary level for these subjects, and for mathematics. Although the TOC has yet to be introduced system-wide in the secondary schools (whether Chinese-medium or English-medium), and, it must be said, there are, and have been, considerable reservations expressed about this extension, the Curriculum Development Institute and Council of Hong Kong prepared curriculum documents in 1999, subsequently ratified and widely distributed, concerning the teaching of English language in secondary schools within a TOC framework (with a supplement for the so-called Advanced Supplementary Level Use of English papers (6th Form in the UK sense)).[2] This document has begun to have some informal impact on secondary level teaching, although it is not as yet mandated as a secondary curriculum for implementation. What is significant for the arguments and illustrations in this Afterword is the central place played by *tasks* in the TOC. Indeed, in casual reference in Hong Kong, there is often an unintended slippage made between a *target*-oriented curriculum and a *task*-oriented curriculum, though this is of course not the appellation of the curriculum documents. In what follows, I draw on these documents to make the connection between tasks-in-curriculum and the calls such system-situated tasks make on task-oriented second language research.

As a way of contextualising this example, let me first outline for readers unfamiliar with Hong Kong or this curriculum the position taken on language learning in these documents, as a backdrop to exploring the orientation they take towards tasks.

Language learning is defined as:

- experiential
- needing to be focused on communicative competence
- prioritised as a learning process
- requiring learners to become independent and to display positive attitudes towards language learning

Language teaching has the goals of:

- helping learners achieve communicative competence, supported by the development of linguistic competence and the mastery of skills and language development strategies

Although familiar enough in current manuals for teacher development in language education, it is important to note that definitions expressed in such a way, and such a statement of language learning and teaching objectives, still display a certain distinctiveness in the world of official second language curriculum documents. Definitions of language learning, and to a lesser degree, perhaps, statements of language teaching objectives, have not so frequently been expressed thus, though we can point to the pioneering work in Europe of the *Rahmenrichtlinien* (curriculum framework) group for secondary levels I and II in the *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) in the German state of Hesse in the 1970s and 1980s (Hessische Kultusminister, 1980). Such official curriculum documents have more usually centered themselves on an enumeration of language *content*, to which has been added some reference to desirable target performance skills, though some, like those from Hesse, have also included desirable classroom teaching practices. Something more of the distinctiveness of the HKSAR documents is captured in this extract of a section of the HKSAR documents provided above, where we note a quite contemporary emphasis on language learning as an experiential learning process (Kohonen et al., 2000), on the development of positive motivational attitudes (Dörnyei, 2000), as well as reference to the now more standard, but nonetheless comprehensive, stance taken by the documents on the relationship between language teaching and the development of communicative competence (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Canale and Swain, 1980).

It is proposed that these objectives are to be underwritten by what is referred to as a 'task-based approach'. This is defined in Hong Kong SAR Government (1999a) as follows

The task-based approach aims at providing opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore both spoken and written language through learning activities which are designed to engage learners in the authentic, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Learners are encouraged to activate and use whatever language they already have in the process of completing a task. The use of tasks will also give a clear and purposeful context for the teaching and learning of grammar and other language features as well as skills. Such language focus components in turn enable learners to construct their knowledge of language structures and functions. All in all, the role of task-based learning is to stimulate a natural desire in learners to improve their language competence by challenging them to complete meaningful tasks. Language use is stimulated and a range of learning opportunities for learners of all levels and abilities are provided. (p. 45)

The document continues:

Effective learning tasks motivate learners by:

- appealing to the imagination
- providing challenge
- developing confidence
- providing a sense of achievement
- expanding interests
- providing enjoyment
- providing learners with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning (p. 45)

and goes on to say that in the process of accomplishing different learning tasks, learners will:

- develop the skills to manipulate the linguistic system spontaneously and flexibly in order to convey meanings appropriately under different circumstances and to interpret the specific meanings intended in written or spoken texts.
- attain a high degree of linguistic competence and become aware of the social meanings and potential communicative functions of linguistic forms in different situations, and
- develop the study skills and strategies for using language to communicate meanings effectively (p. 46)

Given the more epistemological or research-oriented definitions of task offered by some at least of the researchers and applied linguists as set out in the Introduction to this volume, it is interesting to note the more teacher and teaching-focused definition provided in the curriculum documents. Tasks are defined here as:

activities in which learners are required to draw together for further development a range of elements in their framework of knowledge and skills. They are characterized by an emphasis on activity, participation, flexible differentiation, and communication among participants through a variety of modes and media. (p. 46)

Tasks so defined are said to be characterised by the following features, all of which are illustrated and situated in a quite exemplary and detailed fashion in the Hong Kong document. The intention is to have them serve as a basis for curriculum and syllabus design, and to be realised in classrooms through a commitment to a learning-centred pedagogy, a functional as well as form-focused and text-based model of language (Halliday and Hasan, 1989), and a view of teaching as an instructing, mentoring and facilitating process (see van Lier, 1996):

- a task should have a purpose. It involves learners in using language for what the curriculum document sets out as three so-called 'targets' of the TOC, viz. an interpersonal dimension target (for establishing and maintaining relationships; exchanging ideas and information; and getting things done), a knowledge dimension target (for providing, finding out, interpreting and using information; for exploring, expressing and applying ideas; for solving problems), and, finally, an experience dimension target (for responding and giving expression to real and imaginative experience)

- a task should have a context from which the purpose for using language emerges
- a task should involve learners in a mode of talking and doing
- the purposeful activity in which learners engage in carrying out a task should lead towards a product
- a task should require the learners to draw upon their framework of knowledge and skills (p. 47)

Noteworthy in the document is the quite bold emphasis placed in these features and the characteristics listed below, on the linkages asserted among constructs of authenticity, authentication and acquisition (Breen, 1984; Candlin, 1984). This emphasis already highlights one of the prevailing arguments in the HKSAR document in favour of a task-based curriculum in schooling, namely the implicit claim that language activities associated with tasks have considerable preparatory potential for 'real world' communication. This authentication is typical of a nowadays common utilitarian and ends-focused justification for the English curriculum in schools, especially in foreign and second language contexts, though to be fair, Hong Kong's Department of Education lays an equivalent weight on the development of creativity and 'playfulness' in the curriculum (for some contemporary discussion, see Cook, 2000), especially in lower forms. In any case, such tasks should embody the following characteristics:

- they involve communicative language use in which the learners' attention is focused on meaning rather than on linguistic structures
- they should be authentic and as close as possible to the real world and daily life experience of the learners. Authentic materials should be selected. In addition, the processes through which the learner generates oral and written texts and the things that he/she is required to do with the data should also be authentic and relevant
- they should involve learners in various activities in which they are required to negotiate meaning and make choices in what, when and how to learn
- they should provide opportunities for learners to manipulate and practise specific language features, develop language skills, practise the integrated use of language, acquire language development strategies and use language meaningfully and creatively (p. 47)

It is worth pointing out that elsewhere in the document a distinction is drawn between *exercises* and *tasks*. While tasks are held to '*contain*' the four characteristics above, this is not required of *exercises* which are defined as serving as sequenceable preliminaries to, or supporters of, tasks. In keeping with the defining features advanced in Candlin and Murphy (1987), and in all subsequent writings on the topic, tasks themselves are conceived as being potentially of differential levels of demand on learners, in terms of cognitive load, language difficulty, and conceptual content, and can require variable completion times and be undertaken in a variety of contexts and conditions.

Where the curriculum document focuses on the *purposes* of tasks, as in the list below, it is interesting, in the light of the comment earlier, how the documents adopt a particular ideational and transactional orientation.

Tasks should enable learners to:

- seek information
- process information
- formulate questions and responses
- make connections
- inquire
- observe
- discover
- experiment
- practise
- discuss
- analyze
- reason
- share (p. 49)

The emphasis of such purposes is clearly much less affective and interpersonal than in a parallel inventory to be found in Legutke and Thomas (1991), for example. It may be that this transactional focus is not only driven by post-schooling requirements of communication in the 'real world' but is also in line with the aim of the curriculum documents to require language education-focused tasks to reflect knowledge and skills developed across the curriculum, involving ideas and information from other subjects in both the formal and the informal curriculum. Nonetheless, the curriculum document does ask that tasks involve the personal experiences of the learners, and does target a range of different learning styles and strategies, cognitive, metacognitive, and communicative (Cohen, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 1991). The educational interests of the authors of the document are most to the fore in their call for tasks to be differentiated and graded for learners of different interests and abilities, and to display a range of different modes of participation and learning procedure, using a range of media. Perhaps surprising in such an official and system-wide document is the view taken of tasks as a kind of 'bankable resource' from which teachers may draw, but also *modify*. This commitment to openness in the curriculum comes close to some of the arguments for a process curriculum called for by Breen (1987) and Candlin (1984), and illustrated more fully in the examples of so-called *negotiated syllabuses* in Breen and Littlejohn (2000). Teachers are enjoined to evaluate tasks for their effectiveness and to experiment with different ways of integrating tasks into larger projects.

Concerning assessment within the curriculum, the document distinguishes between formative and summative assessment and between learning tasks and assessment tasks, offers a range of modes of such assessment practices, and emphasises strongly the importance of criterion-referencing principles as a way of linking performance with the objectives determined for particular teaching tasks. It makes the point:

> To evaluate learner performance against the learning targets, it is important that assessment tasks are used. Assessment tasks resemble learning tasks in that both of them:

- involve the processes of inquiring, reasoning, conceptualizing, communicating and problem-solving
- require learners to activate their knowledge, strategies and skills in purposeful use of English in contexts

The major difference between assessment tasks and learning tasks is that in learning tasks, teachers need to conduct appropriate pre-task, while-task and post-task activities to ensure that learners can complete the tasks satisfactorily. (p. 127)

So much, then, for the general and specific focus on tasks. I have taken some time to highlight and illustrate this curriculum information so as to emphasise that in the case of Hong Kong, and no doubt elsewhere, the construct of task has come to be seen as a powerful element in, and to an extent a driving force for, innovation in the school curriculum for language education. The issue that then arises, and especially in the context of this book, is the degree to which such understandings of the construct and utility of task are warranted by our current state of research, and, more especially, what directions such a deployment of tasks as a guiding curriculum principle might suggest for future curriculum-oriented applied linguistic research. To pose these questions is not to imply that curriculum development is necessarily dependent on research of this kind, though it can hardly not be informed by it, or even to suggest that task-focused applied linguistic research needs to have a curriculum utility. However, to ignore the connection and potential synergy would be perverse. After all, what the TOC in Hong Kong does exemplify is an intense awareness of the curriculum planners of the recent literature in language acquisition and pedagogy and a strong willingness to see a generally held current view of language as communication and of language learning as process, and the classroom as an interactive site of engagement, to permeate its curriculum guidelines.

III TASK-BASED CURRICULUM-FOCUSED RESEARCH

In his important contributions on the topic, Nunan (1989, 1991, 1993, 1995) provides a highly valuable overview of both task design and second language acquisition research in relation to the construct of task, and in his 1993 paper, especially, rehearses some of the curriculum-related research questions inherent in an orientation of curricula towards a focus on tasks. In a similar way, so do some of the papers in the twin collected volumes edited by Crookes and Gass (1993a, 1993b). The present volume also makes its own important contribution to addressing these curriculum research questions in the works cited in the Introduction and throughout, and, especially, through the specific research reported in its papers. None of these sources, however, specifically addresses the questions that might arise from an actual instance of application in terms of a public curriculum.

Accordingly, what I would like to do is to highlight, somewhat selectively and in point form, some of the issues surrounding research into task design,

task operationalisation and task evaluation that seem to arise in connection with curriculum-related decision-making, drawing on a real-world case, namely, that offered above by the particular example of the TOC in Hong Kong. In doing so, let me make it very clear that I am not in any way singling out the TOC for some critical evaluation. It is a very forward-looking and admirably comprehensive document. What it does permit, however, is some exploration of the assumptions and assertions made by curriculum specialists and educational advisers in designing such guidelines, and at the same time provides an indication of where second language acquisition researchers concerned with curriculum issues might want to direct their research planning.

What follows are not questions which are formulated in terms of researchable hypotheses, or indeed necessarily capable of such formulation, though it is to be hoped that some can be. They may be seen, indeed, as somewhat naïve. From my experience in language teacher professional development within a broadly task-based, process- and negotiation-oriented context, however, they are just the kinds of questions that teachers do, or might well, ask in relation to the viability of a task-based curriculum and its underlying constructs. Thus to provide them may assist readers not only in a reflective reading of the papers in this very timely and well-constructed book, and in other sources, but also to identify where curriculum-related task research in language education might be best directed. They may also assist in the negotiation by teachers of those curriculum guidelines within which they have to work, very much in the manner suggested by Candlin (1987), Breen (1987) or in the practical experiences in different educational sectors now more recently exemplified in the case studies provided in Breen and Littlejohn (2000).

A good place to begin is with the definition of tasks. Following the early statements on language learning tasks (Candlin, 1987; Nunan, 1993), the TOC curriculum, as we have seen, sets out its definition of tasks in terms of purposes, inputs and processes, with expected or indicated outcomes, and locates them in particular settings, where participants are invited to engage in a range of roles. The definitions of task usefully provided in the Introduction to this volume help us to conceptualize these distinctive 'task components', as does their use in curriculum guidelines such as those of the TOC. From these components we may identify three overlapping areas within which potentially researchable questions may be asked: questions concerning task *design*, task *operationalisation* and task *evaluation*. I set out below some of these questions, and direct them at each of the areas.

Task design

Central to task design in the TOC is the construct of *purposiveness*. Tasks are identified as having a range of purposes (for example, *seeking information, processing information*, etc). The issue here must be how these purposes are to be distinctively identified in terms of particular task design and how can they be formulated by learners in terms of actionable goals. Specifically,

- Who determines the purposes of tasks, and to what extent can purposes be defined in advance? If learners in a negotiated curriculum (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Breen and Littlejohn, 2000) redefine content during the process of learning, how can task design control content in relation to participants' changing purposes?
- In what ways can task purposes be identified so that learners and teachers can relate these purposes to particular task activities and participant roles?

Associated with purposiveness are other related terms, such as *practicality* and *functionality*, both of which are closely linked in the TOC to the overarching construct of *authenticity*. If tasks are to be 'authentic' and 'close to the real world and the daily life experiences of learners', the issue must be the terms in which these constructs are being defined and in relation to which of the task components. Specifically,

- How is the 'real world' being constructed? In terms of which participants, which roles, which discursive and social relationships?
- What assumptions are being made here between some perceived identification of the social world of the classroom and the learners' social worlds outside the classroom?
- More broadly, if the achievement of authenticity (whatever that may be) is something of a chimera in pedagogic materials, then how can tasks be authenticated in the curriculum, and by whom?

A key concern of the authors of the TOC curriculum, as we have seen, is that tasks should be designed in relation to a number of so-called target dimensions, in their terms *interpersonality, knowledge* and *experience*. The issue that arises here is once more one of realisation. Specifically, questions to ask include:

- How can these target dimensions be described in terms that teachers and learners can comprehend and how can they be defined independently?
- How can the three 'target dimensions' (of tasks within the TOC) be separately targeted within a task, if any activity, or indeed any utterance stimulated by a task, is potentially all-encompassing of all three?

Characteristic of task-based orientations to language teaching and learning is that they be in some sense *learner-oriented*. This is made explicit in the TOC curriculum, as we have seen. The question to raise here is how is this learner-orientation to be defined? Specifically, we may ask:

- What is the focus of the orientation? Is it in terms of developing learner proficiency, encouraging particular learner roles, or facilitating learner engagement?
- If the tasks are to develop learners' meaning-making capacities (as appears to be the case), what is the relationship between this objective and the necessarily concurrent development of learners' language-processing capacity?
- Given that tasks are to be designed to promote learners' overall strategic competence, how is this being defined psycholinguistically and sociolinguistically?

Task operationalisation

Questions concerning task operationalisation have to do with the realisation of the design features of tasks in terms of actual classroom use. They are thus of considerable interest to those whose role it is to enact the curriculum, namely teachers and learners in classroom contexts. The chief questions here focus on the involvement of these key participants in the process, both of task realisation and of necessity, in task design. Specifically, we may ask:

- What might be the effect on learner accomplishment of tasks of a greater or lesser degree of learner involvement in task design?
- If tasks are to involve learners in making choices in what, when, and how to learn, what are the criteria on which those choices are to be made and how can such purposeful choosing be accommodated within the curriculum?
- If tasks characteristically involve learners in 'active participation', how is this participation being defined?

A fundamental question concerning task-based curricula, and one that is addressed very centrally in the papers in this collection, surrounds the relationship between task design, task operationalisation and task performance. Specifically,

- What relationship might there be between varying degrees of task participation and learner performance and learner acquisition of forms and functions of language?
- The activities of tasks are seen as leading to particular communicative (and other) outcomes. How are these products/outcomes being defined? Do they remain stable during the realising of a task or are they redefined in the process?

One of the key incentives for introducing a task-based language learning curriculum, like the TOC, is the perceived positive effect such a curriculum is presumed to have on learner motivation (Dörnyei, 2000). Such a connection may indeed be well-grounded and justified, but issues arise, nevertheless. Specifically, we may ask:

- If 'effective' tasks and their associated characteristics in terms of purposes and activities are held to have a close relationship with motivation, in that they are held to *challenge, provide imaginative appeal, develop confidence*, how are these attributes of tasks to be defined and operationalised? How can their presence or absence be related to motivation? How can tasks be evaluated a priori against such desiderata?

Central to undertaking the design and operationalisation of any public curriculum in the sense of a planned, institutionally-based programme, is the need to select, to grade and to sequence. The questions we may specifically ask in this context must include:

- How can tasks be selected, graded and sequenced within the curriculum? What would be the criteria for grading and co-ordinating such tasks? What

would be the balance, for example, between an externally-motivated selection and sequencing procedure, namely, one based on their perceived out-of-class utility; a class-internal procedural one, based on some linking of skills in the exploitation of some theme; or one more cognitively driven, as in Prabhu's suggestion that tasks be sequenced as a cycle of immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualisation and practical action (Prabhu, 1987)?

These are obviously only some of the possibilities. One might, for example, argue for a task sequence in relation to any of the components of a task: its purpose(s), its processes, its outcome(s) and its modes of evaluation. Equally, one might sequence tasks in order to develop the socialisation of the learner within the classroom milieu. There are numerous possibilities and, at present at least, the TOC leaves them open.

Task evaluation

As is clear from the papers in this volume, and from the other sources that are cited here, the literature on task evaluation has primarily addressed two sets of issues: those concerned with evaluating the contributions of tasks to the development of learner cognition and acquisition and those which have been focused on the evaluation of learners' language performance. There are other, perhaps more fundamental questions to be asked concerning the evaluation of tasks, and the relationships between tasks and evaluation. Specifically,

- In relation to the issue of evaluating learner cognition and acquisition, what social factors in terms of learners' backgrounds, schooling, out-of-class socialisation, are being taken into account?
- In relation to the evaluation of learners' language performance, the overwhelming focus of research has been directed at learners' lexico-grammar. Despite an increasing amount of empirical studies in the development of interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper and Rose, 1999), we may ask why has there been little *curriculum-oriented* research which seeks to connect task design and operationalisation with the systematic development of learner discursive strategies and pragmatic behaviour?

As I indicated earlier, these are questions, not a research agenda. Nonetheless, they are suggestive of the research, experimental or, desirably, action-oriented, which needs to be undertaken if the eminently cogent and appealing guidelines for a task-oriented curriculum such as that of the TOC in Hong Kong are to be substantiated and, above all, translated into warranted classroom (inter)action. This seems to me to be the thrust of this imaginative book and its research papers, namely, to develop further a necessary research basis not only for the construct of *task*, but for the warranting of tasks as a central principle in curriculum design, implementation and evaluation. It is to that wider goal that this Afterword is directed.

NOTES

1. I acknowledge here the genial and very relevant title of Patricia Duff's (1986) paper: P. Duff (1986) Another look at interlanguage talk: taking task to task. In R. Day (ed.) *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
2. Hong Kong SAR Government, Education Department (1998, 1999a, 1999b).

REFERENCES

Breen, M. (1984) Process syllabuses for the language classroom. In C.J. Brumfit (ed.) *General English Syllabus Design.* Oxford: Pergamon Press and the British Council.

Breen, M. (1987) Contemporary paradigms in syllabus design. Parts 1 & 2. *Language Teaching,* 20 (1): 81–92; 20 (2): 157–74.

Breen, M. and Candlin, C.N. (1980) The essentials of a communicative curriculum for language teaching. *Applied Linguistics,* 1 (2): 89–112.

Breen, M. and Littlejohn, A. (eds) (2000) *Classroom Decision-making: Negotiation and Process Syllabuses in Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980) Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics,* 1: 1–47.

Candlin, C.N. (1984) Syllabus design as a critical process. *Language, Learning and Communication,* 3 (2): 129–45. Also in revised form in C. Brumfit (ed.) *General English Curriculum Design.* ELT Documents No. 118. London: Pergamon Press.

Candlin, C.N. (1987) Towards task-based language learning. In C.N. Candlin and D.F. Murphy (1987).

Candlin, C.N. and Edelhoff, C. (1982) *Challenges: Teachers' Guide.* London: Longman.

Candlin, C.N. and Murphy, D.F. (eds) (1987) *Language Learning Tasks.* Lancaster Practical Papers in English Language Education. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall.

Cohen, A. (1997) *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language.* London: Longman.

Cook, G. (2000) *Language Play, Language Learning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crookes, G. and Gass, S. (1993a) *Tasks and Language Learning: Integrating Theory and Practice.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Crookes, G. & Gass, S. (1993b) *Tasks in a Pedagogical Context: Integrating Theory and Practice.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Dewey, J. (1933) *How We Think.* Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.

Dewey, J. (1938) *Experiences of Education.* New York: Collier Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (2000) *Teaching and Researching Motivation.* London: Longman.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R. (1989) *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hessische Kultusminister, Der (ed.) (1980) *Rahmenrichtlinien: Sekundarstufe 1. Neue Sprachen.* Frankfurt: Diesterweg.

Hong Kong SAR Government, Education Department (1998) *Target-oriented Curriculum Assessment Guidelines for English Language.* Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Hong Kong SAR Government, Education Department (1999a) *Draft Syllabuses for Secondary Schools. English Language (Secondary 1–5).* Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Hong Kong SAR Government, Education Department (1999b) *Syllabuses for Secondary Schools. Use of English. Advanced Supplementary Level.* Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Kasper, G. and Rose, K. (1999) Pragmatics and SLA. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19: 81–104.

Kohonen, V., Jaatinen, R., Kaikkonen, P. and Lehtovaara, J. (eds) (2000) *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education*. London: Longman.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (1991) Language learning tasks: teacher intention and learner interpretation. *ELT Journal*, 45: 98–107.

Legutke, M. and Thomas, H. (1991) *Process and Experience in the Language Classroom*. London: Longman.

Linder, P. (2000) Is a negotiated syllabus feasible within a national curriculum? In M. Breen and A. Littlejohn (2000).

Nunan, D.N. (1989) *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D.N. (1991) Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25: 279–97.

Nunan, D.N. (1993) Task-based syllabus design: selecting, grading and sequencing tasks. In G. Crookes and S. Gass (1993b).

Nunan, D.N. (1995) Closing the gap between learning and instruction. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20 (1): 133–58.

Prabhu, N.S. (1987) *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ribe, R. (1994) *L'ensenyament de la llengua anglesa al cicle escolar secondari (12–18 anys)*. Bellaterra: Publicacions de la Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona.

Ribe, R. (2000) Introducing negotiation processes: an experiment with creative project work. In M. Breen and A. Littlejohn (2000).

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann.

van Lier, L. (1996) *Interaction in the Language Curriculum: Awareness, Autonomy & Authenticity*. London: Longman.