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## **Innovating in Initial Teacher Education: A New Integrated Curriculum for Meaningful English Learning**

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### **Introduction**

We have worked as teachers of English in Santiago, Chile and abroad for a long time, putting all of it together approximately during the last forty five years. Early in our professional lives we opted for teacher education to be able to address and find solutions to the problems related with school teachers' pre-service education and the unsuccessful results obtained by secondary school leavers in the use of the language.

For seventeen years, schools and universities were in the hands of the military or people designated by the Military Junta. Faculties of Education were removed from universities and turned into technical institutes. Teaching ceased to be considered an academic profession and those graduates became technicians. The obvious result was a loss of quality and dignity, evidenced in school results of the vast majority of the population. Once we returned to a democratic form of government in 1990, pedagogy programs became university professions once again. But, by law, universities continued to be autonomous, so the Ministry did not have the authority to set guidelines for the teacher training programs they offer. So, the educational reform, crucial goal for the Ministry of Education, focussed on primary and secondary schools only.

This reform affected English significantly. English had become the language of globalization. Therefore, for the government it became obvious that promoting the teaching and learning of the language was a national priority. One of the main measures was to move the teaching of English from seventh down to fifth grade in order to extend students exposure to the language to eight full years. This was implemented in classrooms in 1998 with a new curriculum, new programs, new free textbooks and a totally different approach to the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, one of the most important obstacles for this new policy to be effective was that no provisions had been made about the number of English teachers available to cover fifth and sixth grades. As a result,

many schools in the country had to hire teachers of other subjects who did not even speak the language. The urgency for universities to strengthen and expand TEFL programs was evident, but it took them years to react and offer programs to train teachers for primary schools. Another consequence was that English became the only foreign language that had official programs for each school year and free official textbooks. This resulted in teachers of French, for example, having to switch over to teachers of English, with very little support from their schools of government.

On the other hand, the new curriculum also set guidelines for moving from grammar translation to a more modern and communicative text based approach developing the receptive skills with less emphasis on the productive skills. By that time, English was seen mainly as a tool that would allow citizens to have access to information (Mineduc 2005:65) and to better jobs. After about 850 hours the whole program offered, the idea was that students would be able to, with enough learning strategies, understand written and oral texts, plus have a basic command of spoken English. Voluntary training, organized by the the Ministry of Education, was given to classroom teachers by universities during the summer of 1998, plus a two week workshop during their winter holidays. The authors participated in this project and felt the impact of classroom teachers' despair at having to change their ways and practices so drastically. This was another sign for us to start thinking about getting involved in teacher education trying to find out what it was that we needed to improve, remove or adjust in a pre-service teacher education program.

The precise moment came when we were asked to design an initial teacher education program for English at Universidad Alberto Hurtado (UAH), a Jesuit university in 2004; and then later to develop and implement it in 2005. This led to a five year curriculum design where the emphasis was placed on language as a complex, but unitary phenomenon, and on the process of language teaching and learning. The central idea was to reduce the fragmentation of traditional Chilean curricula present in most local universities. We observed that one of the consequences of such fragmentation is an excess of grammar, phonetics and vocabulary subjects. This distracted the main aim of enabling teachers to speak English at an advanced level and, at the same time, know how to teach it with enough methodology and pedagogy theoretical knowledge and classroom practice. Julian Edge (2011) explains that separating areas to be analyzed and categorized can take us a long way. However, the world is not divided into its constituent parts, the purpose remains to understand the whole a little better. In his own words, Edge asks: "Isn't that, for instance, what grammar is all about?" (2011:12). Our design did not give less importance to linguistic knowledge but integrated

areas such as the above mentioned in the English Language strand. Therefore, we proposed three major strands: a) English Language, b) Linguistics and Methodology and c) Work Experience, Practicum and Reflection Workshops, but maintaining two Lexico-Grammar subjects, one Phonetics, two Culture and Civilization and four Literature subjects. We also had humanistic subjects as a university requirement – like Philosophy, History, Math, Spanish, etc. The program was divided into a two year foundation stage followed by a three year disciplinary, pedagogical stage. Also, by the time students finished their second year their level of English should be B2, since they would have had twenty hours of English a week and 850 hours in two years. We felt this was a huge leap from the way we had been educated as teachers, but there was still something missing that prevented our students from becoming the professionals we expected them to become. Program integration was still unsatisfactory not being able to cause our students to relate the different contents into one whole. Teachers, on the other hand, had not yet grasped the full concept of ‘integration’ so each concentrated on their own topic or discipline without connecting with the rest. As Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) state, knowledge is not separated from its reality, people cannot really disconnect themselves from their enquiry; the curriculum cannot really exist as separate bits. We needed our teachers of English to be imbued in the complexities of the teaching and learning process. Academic education is meaningful inasmuch as it contributes to a more effective practice because the future teacher fits into the exit profile and they have understood that theory and practice need to go together.

## **New Developments**

By the time our students were in their fifth year in 2010, an important review of our program had to take place. The team (Head of Program, Methodology, Language, Practicum and ICTs coordinators) met during that year to reflect, discuss and interview focus groups of students, alumni and stakeholders to share issues, adjustments and new ideas on how to answer the challenge of educating our students according to our new exit profile. The project was finally approved by the University authorities and implemented in 2011 with the name of ‘Integrated Curriculum’. The core principle underpinned in our proposal is clearly stated by Norton and Toohey (2005:1): “... language is not simply a means of expression or communication: rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future”

At the same time, after twelve years of the reform in the teaching of English in Chile, the Ministry of Education decided to evaluate the level of English students were graduating with. Unfortunately, international English tests given by the Ministry to the whole population of eleventh graders in the country in 2010, 2012 and in 2014 proved beyond a doubt that students, around 85% to 90%, were leaving secondary school without having reached even the language competence level prescribed for primary education leavers, CEFR A2.

The English team at UAH, very much aware of the seriousness of what was disclosed, felt and accepted the challenge for an urgent and drastic innovation in how future teachers should be educated in our pre-service program. Namely, we needed to come to terms with and find answers to several issues we had not been able to address up to then. As Widdowson (2003) asks, what kind of options are there in language pedagogy, and how might we theorize about them? This led us to think that a protected time and space were needed to effectively sit down and reflect about our options, rethink our curriculum with the exit profile in mind. Therefore, in December, 2013, a three day academic retreat for all the staff involved in teaching the discipline subjects was held. This event took place in Leyda, a holiday resort about an hour away from Santiago, so that the work could be done without interruptions of any kind and concentrating on the discussion. The objective of the meeting was to reflect on how we were implementing the new curriculum, identifying strengths and weaknesses and creating strategies that would help us enhance the education of our future teachers and ensure the achievement of the exit profile. One crucial unexpected product was **a half-way profile** at the end of the second year to account for the expected outcomes of the foundation stage. This profile sets the guidelines and builds a bridge to allow progress monitoring thus avoiding knowledge and practice gaps in our newly qualified teachers. This half - way profile was stated as follows:

*“A student who begins the third year of the English Pedagogy Program at Universidad Alberto Hurtado, is inquisitive about academic learning; able to raise questions and propose solutions from a critical perspective to complex issues emerging from their own reflection and from the classroom. This reflects a student with committed and well-founded opinions, with a clear sense of social participation and who is active in the English Pedagogy program. The student has developed professional attitudes of responsibility, autonomy and flexibility; and ethical attitudes of respect, justice and honesty. At the same time, the student is able to work in teams in a collaborative manner, with assertiveness and respect for diversity. In terms of their English language competence, the student who begins third year is able to demonstrate a higher intermediate level equivalent to CEFR B2.”*

Another product was a *set of projects* to improve our integrated curriculum program. First of all, a *Code of Practice* was planned to be developed in order to address our students' lack of inquisitive knowledge and academic attitude, plus low self-esteem. Also, a *portfolio* was considered to be necessary in order to facilitate students' awareness of their own learning progress with hard evidence. In addition, *student participation* will be encouraged with invitations and access to academic and professional events and activities, such as designing and implementing free subjects for 16-18 year-olds with logistic and academic support from the team; publishing a bulletin board, an academic gazette, and/or a virtual magazine/blog, etc. With regards to *Integrated Language*, three different strategies were considered: (1) the design and use of an instrument to monitor proficiency levels across the nine semesters; (2) the design and use of an instrument to measure the effect of explicitly discussing with students the methodology used in IEL; and (3) coordination/integration of other relevant subjects with language and among themselves. Another project was to design a map of *Critical Thinking* to be applied to all subjects in the 10 semesters of our program. Such map was necessary so they would be able to build their own arguments. In the half-way profile, the expectations are for students to raise issues and propose solutions, be accountable for their actions and propose actions of participation, critically. And finally, the exit profile specifies that our students can identify intervention needs for cultural change. Considering our first year students' feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, lack of study habits and cultural wealth, our proposal is to have a *tutorial program* to help them insert themselves in the university community. Groups of ten students with a tutor, a first year teacher, meet every two weeks with activities and topics chosen by an educational psychologist, who is the coordinator of this program. Finally, the belief that our four strands have to be interactive and interrelated is addressed by designing and providing guidelines to unify strategies, methodologies and assessment criteria for all subjects.

The team decided we had two years to carry out this set of projects ending with a full review of the new program in 2015.

## 2011 Program

Our UAH team developed a program that aims at educating a professional described in the following exit profile:

*"A teacher of English graduated from Universidad Alberto Hurtado is a professional who seeks to permanently enrich the development of their thoughts from multiple perspectives in order to com-*

*prehend social dynamics present in school contexts, and to identify intervention needs for cultural transformation. In this pursuit, they offer creativity, advanced English language competence, both orally and in written form, and expert management of its teaching at the service of such transformation. In this way, they can generate significant social changes in the school context using the teaching of language as a tool to diminish inequity and educate critical citizens with self-esteem and dignity.”*

In order to educate a professional with those characteristics, the five-year-program consists of a total number of 46 subjects and workshops organized in four strands: (1) Integrated English Language; (2) Psychology, Linguistics and TEFL Methodology; (3) Work Experience, Reflective Workshops and Practicum; (4) Education and Humanities; and Elective subjects.

The Integrated English Language (IEL) strand consists of a single subject each semester. The first two years this subject has ten modules (20 hours) which go down to five modules (10 hours) from third to fifth year. This subject serves the purpose of developing communication skills as well as critical thinking and social skills. Additionally, in this subject students learn the structural components of language; grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Literature is also another component of this subject. All of the above are taught in topic units where students have the opportunity to learn English while reflecting on issues of relevance for their personal growth and for their education as future teachers: Identity, Professionalism, School Culture, Citizenship, Teenage Issues and Inclusive Education are among the discussed topics. At the end of each unit, students are expected to provide hard evidence of their learning. They are given different tasks like designing and producing a magazine; recording a video, within certain constraints but as professionally as possible; projects offering reflective proposals to issues raised in the discussions of the different topics, etc. They also have to produce a multimodal journal recording their learning related to the contents of each unit, as well as the language they have learnt and the teaching - methodological strategies - they have been exposed to.

The TEFL methodology strand provides the theoretical foundations and practices of language teaching. This strand includes psychology, the linguistics and language teaching theory that supports both how students learn a language and how English as a foreign language should be taught. On the other hand, Work Experience, Reflective Workshops and Practicum is the strand that offers students

opportunities to put their methodological knowledge and skills into practice in real school contexts. While Reflective Workshops give students the opportunity to relate theory and practice, to develop more awareness through exploration, to discuss their classroom experiences, issues and findings among themselves and with a tutor, who usually is the Practicum teacher. This subject aims at developing in our students the need to challenge the reality of classrooms today. They bring real cases for analysis and exploration to come up with their own alternatives. Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) suggest that we explore what we actually do in our teaching as opposed to what we think we are doing. Awareness leads to a common consequence of these activities in our students, they feel the shock of poverty, vulnerability, and, in general, of a neoliberal system which cannot provide fair, democratic opportunities for quality and equitable education. The team expectations are that our students will be able to move on to find compensatory strategies to balance out the deprivation of children in vulnerable schools through the teaching of English. They will be able to do it because the program has used theory-informed practice as an approach to methodology, so they can seek to define problems as explicitly as possible so that they are amenable to solution reactively in the teaching/learning process (Widdowson, 2003).

The Education strand aims at giving students the opportunity of learning and reflecting on education in a broader sense and those subjects are offered during the first two years of our program. They are introduced to a general perspective of the role of education in society; the different educational approaches from a historical and philosophical point of view, Chilean public educational policies and curriculum; discussions about ethics and education, philosophy and education, school culture and the role of teachers in the educational system, and a critical overview of social history of Chile and Latin America. This is a Jesuit university with an explicitly social mission we agree with. They believe humanistic subjects will make students reflect about themselves and others, these subjects will allow them to develop a deeper understanding about the complexities they will be faced with in their classrooms, so students can then become effective agents of social change. We therefore connect this with the discipline, thinking that through English as their instrument, they will truly cause an impact in their own students.

In relation with the Elective subjects, students can choose topics from a wide variety that aim at giving them the chance to experience university education in an even broader sense. These subjects



offered include theological and ethical topics, sports and physical fitness, the arts (music, visual arts), social skills and self-esteem.

The first four strands have a common cross-curricular denominator which reveals where we stand now as teacher educators in Chile. We work under the methodological principle that reflective critical thinking skills applied to social groups in the classroom, school communities and society are the key to what Freire and Macedo (1995) define as “epistemological curiosity”; a balance between theory and practice that helps students exercise well-founded observation of reality that leads to its problematization and subsequent proposal for changes.

### *Our Students*

A fundamental consideration we had in mind in the design of the 2011 program is the characteristics of the student who enter the program. During our retreat we spent a good deal of time to identify such characteristics. The result was the following *entry profile*:

*“The student who is accepted the pre-service English teacher education program at UAH tends to be highly motivated to learn and teach English, feel appealed with the idea of becoming a professional and feel identified with the mission and vision of our University. They expect to receive the correct answer to the questions and problems in relation to knowledge, information and opinions which, according to staff, is reflected in lack of inquisitive knowledge and are unable to build their own arguments to support, for example, a political stand. They tend to show unawareness of their identity and lack of self-esteem. Therefore, they avoid interaction in heterogeneous groups (lifestyles, beliefs, interests, special needs, etc.). Staff also observe that they lack study skills, autonomy, critical disposition, responsibility and show a client-oriented disposition.”*

The above profile does not describe a student who is prepared to face university challenges. However, UAH, our program, and the authors in particular, subscribe to the principle of inclusion; we aim at offering the highest quality education to students who would not have access to tertiary education otherwise. Some of the strategies we have designed concerning this issue are: tutorials for all first year students, a drama club organized by them and which is open to students of all levels; students’ participation in department governance and Integrated English Language (IEL) program de-

sign; language workshops designed and given by IEL teacher assistants where students of all levels can participate according to the topics of their choice which supposedly are the ones students want.

### *Our Teachers*

One major feature of the teachers in our program is their ability to be flexible, efficient, committed team workers. The authors have created a specific way for teams who teach IEL to work together. They rely heavily on ICTs for this purpose: online documents where they share and build lesson plans, materials, and relevant information about classes and students.

The role of the strand coordinators is key to guarantee a continuum in terms of inter-related contents, students' tasks and experiences, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) projects; and methodological principles such as learning centeredness, learning by doing, autonomy and critical thinking.

### **Conclusion**

The authors feel that, after all the experiences lived while teaching and observing teacher trainees doing their practicum in a wide range of schools and universities and with a variety of classroom teachers, we have gathered enough knowledge and information that allowed us to design the first version of our English teacher education program at UAH in 2005. At some point during the first five years of its implementation, we came across Jack Richards' Curriculum Development in Language Teaching (2001) which made a lot of sense for our needs. His Situation Analysis proposal of taking into account societal factors, project factors, institutional factors, teachers factors, learners factors and adoption factors are the elements that provided the model for the readjustment of our program and it made the rest of the process more relevant. We believe that this program will be able to graduate teachers who respond to our exit profile, and in doing so, will be able to not only teach English efficiently, but will be the agents of change Chile needs: teachers who possess a deep understanding that English is primarily our means of communication with the rest of the world; teachers teach English knowing that grammar and phonetics are just another component at the service of their students development of communication skills; and teachers who understand that English teaching and learning offer a rich opportunity to empower their students as citizens who know themselves and value who they are individually and collectively.

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Appendix

Program Subjects Chart

English Pedagogy Program, Universidad Alberto Hurtado

	1 sem	2 sem	3 sem	4 sem	5 sem	6 sem	7 sem	8 sem	9 sem	10 sem
<b>Integrated English Language</b>	Integrated English Language 1	Integrated English Language 2	Integrated English Language 3	Integrated English Language 4	Integrated English Language 5	Integrated English Language 6	Integrated English Language 7	Integrated English Language 8	Integrated English Language 9	Thesis Seminar
<b>TEFL Methodology</b>				Introduction to Linguistics	Applied Linguistics	Methodology 1	Methodology 2	Methodology 3	Methodology 4	
					Learning Psychology of the Child and Adolescent 1	Learning Psychology of the Child and Adolescent 1	British Literature	North American Literature		
<b>Work Experience and Practicum</b>					Work Experience 1	Work Experience 2	Work Experience 3	Work Experience 4	Practicum 1	Practicum 2
<b>Education</b>	History	Sociology	Philosophy	Introduction to Psychology						
	Introduction to Education	Chilean Educational Reality	Ethics and Education	Introduction to Educational Practice and Curriculum	Reflection Workshop 1	Reflection Workshop 2	Reflection Workshop 3	Reflection Workshop 4	Reflection Workshop 5	Degree Exam and Thesis
<b>Elective courses</b>		Theological / Ethical course 1	Theological / Ethical course 1	General Elective Course 1	General Elective Course 1					
<b>Other courses</b>	Spanish Writing		Mathematics							

