

## **SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR OVERSEAS CENTRES OF THE REVISED RSA/UCLES CERT. TEFLA SYLLABUS.**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper identifies the key areas in which the recently revised RSA/UCLES CTEFLA syllabus differs from the old syllabus, and goes on to consider the implications these changes will have for a course run at a typical overseas centre - the British Council in Tokyo. To successfully implement the necessary changes the trainers in such centres will need support and training themselves, and a number of suggestions as to how this may be carried out under the auspices of RSA/UCLES are suggested.*

### **Introduction**

For the last seventeen years, the RSA - latterly with UCLES - has been validating a certificate in the teaching of English as a foreign language to adults. This has become the most well known certificate in initial teacher training in the world, and according to its Course Description, the Cert. TEFLA, as it is most commonly known, is taught to about 8,000 would be teachers in 100 centres around the world each year. For the last ten years, the Certificate has been based on a single syllabus and as a result, many centres have developed courses which have changed little from year to year, and which can be picked up by a trainer schooled in the RSA "way" and taught with minimal preparation. However, from October 1996, the RSA/UCLES are introducing a revised syllabus to which each centre must adhere (this syllabus is being piloted in some centres at the present time). There seem to be two underlying reasons for the change in syllabus: the first is to take into account the findings of research into second language acquisition and theories of language and learning derived from this; the second is to recognise the fact that many centres have already implemented changes

to their courses which are more in line with this research but which fit uncomfortably into the present syllabus as it stands.

The focus of this paper is to discuss how the new syllabus will affect centres, and hence trainers, which have based their courses very much on the old syllabus and the understood “culture” of the RSA, many of which, I believe, are overseas. In order to do this, I will first briefly discuss this RSA “culture” and how it has evolved from the old syllabus; the extent to which the revised syllabus promotes change and what these changes actually are will then be outlined. In order to fully appreciate these changes, I will explain how the RSA Cert. TEFLA Course that I ran at The British Council in Tokyo could be affected by the changes. Finally, I will suggest some practical ways that the RSA/UCLES might enable these centres to develop their courses to come more in line with present day thinking as reflected in the new syllabus. Throughout the essay, the Tokyo course, a sample timetable for which is supplied in Appendix A, will be referred to.

### **The RSA Culture**

The present RSA syllabus could not be said to be a detailed document; indeed, the section entitled “Syllabus Areas” which should contain the teaching points, comprises a mere 357 words. For this reason, trainers have scoured the Course Description document for details of what they should actually teach on the course. In the Mode of Assessment section (7.1, subsection (i)), more explicit areas appear to be outlined. One of these, (7.1, subsection (i) (a)) states:

The candidate has demonstrated an awareness and understanding of adult learners, of language, and of basic principles of language learning.

While subsection (i) (d) declares:

The candidate has demonstrated an ability to manage classes effectively and to provide appropriate presentation, practice and production activities.

A “PPP” culture (Presentation, Practice and Production) with an “accumulated entities” (Rutherford, 1987) approach to language - based on the verb-phrase - has hence evolved from these statements as the mainstay of many an RSA/UCLES Cert. TEFLA course. The RSA would deny that it has fostered such an approach - a difficult argument to sustain given the evidence in black and white - but Edwards (1996) is surely correct when she concludes:

“assessment based on the trainees jumping through a number of hoops in the form of what has become to be known as the “RSA Lesson” [that is PPP] is the teacher training equivalent of monitoring for conformity.”

The fact that many trainers in overseas centres feel isolated, far from other trainers with whom they can discuss new ideas and approaches to language learning and teaching, has contributed to sustaining this belief that trainees must be able to implement a PPP methodology in order to gain the Certificate - the Tokyo timetable, (Appendix A), shows that at least one tenth of the input sessions were devoted to teaching PPP, while approximately a fifth of the course dealt with items of language, such as “conditionals” which could then be developed by trainees in their teaching practice. External Assessors, often coming from similar centres, tend to uphold this status quo as it justifies what they themselves are doing. Furthermore, the higher RSA/UCLES teaching qualification, the Diploma, continues to demand of candidates an ability to produce a PPP lesson, further enhancing teachers’ belief in and loyalty to the method.

The force of the attack on Rod Ellis’(1993) criticism of such a methodology by Hopkins and Nettles (1994), is witness to this reality: although Ellis (ibid) convincingly argues that a PPP approach does not result in effective mastery of grammar by students, and that a consciousness - raising approach would result in more effective language learning, Hopkins and Nettles (ibid) claim that “Ellis style” consciousness raising and opportunity for language use already commonly occur

within the PPP framework, somewhat missing Ellis' point. What is most important in maintaining the culture, however, is the RSA/UCLES syllabus itself which states categorically what trainees must be able to do.

### **The Revised Syllabus**

#### 7 KH3 URP IRWRQIRI&KDQJHI

As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the reasons that the RSA/UCLES have introduced a revised syllabus is to take into account new approaches to language and learning. There is undoubtedly amongst professional EFL practitioners (although mainly, I would argue, in the UK) a "paradigm shift" (see Woodward, 1996), away from the traditional RSA culture of PPP, towards a more "consciousness raising" (Rutherford, 1987) approach to language acquisition, with an emphasis on task-based learning. However, before we can categorically state that the revised syllabus does involve this paradigmatic shift, let us first consider the actual changes to the syllabus.

#### 7 KH&KDQJHY

The revised syllabus looks, after an initial reading, to be dealing with many of the same areas as the old syllabus but in a more comprehensive manner. This is partly achieved by the much improved formatting of the document which clearly defines both the areas to be covered and the depth of coverage. However, a close reading reveals that there have been some fundamental changes made which will affect how the more traditional centres run their courses. These changes are outlined below:

/ DQXDJHI - perhaps one of the most fundamental changes. The revised syllabus omits all reference to presentation, practice and production, any procedures relating to this and the notion of selection and grading of language; even the word "grammar" per se is dropped. In its place, candidates are required to understand the basic concepts and terminology used in textbooks to describe language, and have an understanding of form and meaning.

6 NIKOV- again no mention of techniques or procedures for dealing with skills; instead candidates should have the “basic concepts and terminology used for describing language skills and sub-skills.”

§ GXOM EDUQHUV- this section has been greatly expanded to require candidates to understand more about the culture and learning consensus of the adult groups which they are teaching. Motivation of adult learners is also introduced.

5 IYXKUEHV- the list of materials that the candidate is required to be able to deal with - authentic and non-authentic materials etc. - is dropped and replaced with an emphasis on the ability to evaluate materials and to adapt them when necessary.

3 URIHWIRQDQI IYHOSIP IQW not only must a candidate continue to be able to accept criticism and work effectively with colleagues, she/he must also be given the tools with which to continue developing professionally at the completion of the course.

1 IZ □\$ UEDV - these include: syllabus design, the differences between languages, using reference books for language awareness, materials for testing.

° IYDUGRHS UEDV- these include: phonology, planning parts of and complete lessons, concept checking.

As can be seen from this brief analysis, the emphasis has shifted away from descriptions of language and how to teach it and onto the learner and the continuing professional development of the teacher. This may be to the good, but to pretend that this allows centres more flexibility to run the kinds of courses it wants to run is misleading. The revised syllabus comprises completely different areas of concern which centres will have to engage with if they want their courses to be reapproved. Any other interpretation would invalidate the authority of the syllabus itself.

For example, the PPP approach has disappeared completely and will leave many centres wondering with what to replace it. While it could be argued that there is no real mention of any method, thereby leaving decisions about methodology up to

individual centres, many centres will see its omission as a condemnation of an approach whose demise has been heralded for many a year (see Lightbown, 1985, Prahbu 1987, Willis, 1990, and Ellis, 1993, amongst others).

In addition, the change of focus to the learner and towards self-development will mean introducing new sessions and therefore, because of the constraints of time, discarding others. To highlight the extent to which a typical course might have to adapt, there follows a discussion of how the Tokyo course could change to meet syllabus demands.

### **A Sample Revision**

Appendix A holds a Cert. TEFLA course timetable from 1992. In order for it to comply with the revised syllabus, I believe that many changes would have to be made. The first change would have to be to increase the number of sessions on the learner - currently only one - to focus on prescribed areas such as motivation and learning styles. This could also be integrated into an assignment involving the trainees in interviewing students that they teach on Teaching Practice (TP). It could also feed much more into the planning of lessons and the development of sessions; Burke (1994) has already illustrated how trainee/student diaries can play an important role in deciding what aspects of language awareness to build into a Cert. TEFLA course.

The sessions on PPP would have to be rethought in favour of “the selection and evaluation of appropriate exercise types, activity types, and tasks for specific lessons.” (p. 5, 3.4). RSA/UCLES revised CTEFLA Syllabus, this would enable the trainers to reevaluate elements such as drilling and role play, if appropriate to the local consensus on learning, and explore the plethora of task-based approaches which have developed over recent years (see Willis, 1990 and Nunan, 1989).

Instead of attempting to improve “language awareness” through, “a descriptive breakdown of language into constituent components” (Kerr, 1993), exercises and tasks could be introduced to highlight problems with language through consulting different reference sources. As Willis (1996) suggests, problem solving activities are thought to help learners develop appropriate learning strategies - the same may hold for teacher trainees. More time could also be spent on investigating language problems that arise from teaching practice rather than attempting to predict the difficulties. This kind of process syllabus would enable trainers to dovetail even more successfully language awareness with TP.

Trainers will also have to consider carefully how they will deal with such issues as language comparison - a one-off foreign language learning experience is clearly not sufficient; phonology - given its omission from the revised syllabus, are two sessions sufficient or too many; and testing, which does not appear on this timetable at all.

Perhaps the most important new area on the revised syllabus concerns the continuing professional development of the teacher. While many trainers would argue that the feedback sessions that they run on TP encompass this area, the growing body of research into feedback techniques suggests that it could well be necessary for trainees to actually learn how to, “assess their strengths and weaknesses, and make practical use of that assessment”, (RSA/UCLES phot syllabus, p.12, 6.1). Edge’s (1992) argument that the ability to assess strengths and weaknesses derives from the ability to discuss teaching in a cooperative, equal and collaborative environment could have consequences for timetabling feedback on the course.

Trainers round the world will be concerned to follow the syllabus but worried about how best to do this; by failing to give any guidance on methodology, the RSA/UCLES places a great burden on many practitioners whose knowledge and understanding of new approaches to language and learning are sometimes limited. In

order to avoid a situation in which many trainers feel inadequately prepared to teach the new syllabus, and alienated from the body which has implemented it, the RSA/UCLES must take every opportunity to retrain its trainers. The RSA/UCLES may claim that the intention of the new syllabus is not to cause centres such as Tokyo to drastically review their programme, but rather to allow less traditional centres to feel free to follow a more innovatory programme. However, I am sure that many overseas centres such as Tokyo will view the revised syllabus as a mandate for change. How this change should be managed is the concern of the remainder of this paper.

### **Managing Change**

In his article, **Innovation for a change: teacher development and education**, (1987), Kennedy explores three types of strategy, introduced by Chin and Benne (1970), which can bring about change. These are:

1. power-coercive strategies
2. rational-empirical strategies
3. normative-re-educative strategies

The first of these implies that sanctions are put into place to force people to change, for example, most people now wear seat belts because the law states they must. The second involves persuading people of the benefit of adopting the change, and works best when people are already sympathetic to the change, for example, most people in this country now believe that the campaign against drink - drivers is for the general good. The third strategy, the normative-re-educative strategy, involves getting people to change what they fundamentally believe in or how they act. As Kennedy (ibid) states:

Implementation of this third strategy,...., necessitates a collaborative, problem-solving approach, with all those affected by the change involved in some way and making their own decisions about the degree and manner of change they wish to accept.



He suggests that it is the latter strategy which will have the most far reaching consequences resulting in the most successful changes.

The revised syllabus could be seen as resulting from a conglomeration of all three strategies: the change was initiated as a result of deep felt anxiety about the efficacy of the current syllabus, and its implied PPP approach, amongst a growing number of course tutors and trainers (see Woodward, 1996) (strategy 3); it was compiled after exhaustive consultation with trainers in the field (strategy 2); and from 1996, trainers will have no choice but to teach the syllabus (strategy 1). However, many trainers still feel comfortable running the course based on the present syllabus: while the power-coercive syllabus change from RSA/UCLES may force them to change to some extent, in order to help them to implement the changes wholeheartedly, further efforts in the areas of strategies 2 and 3 must be made. How can this be done?

ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Many TEFL/Applied Linguistics departments of universities are having tremendous success with distance learning MA's. The files of work students receive are packed with pertinent readings and relevant tasks. The opportunity to discuss the ideas contained in the packs, both with colleagues and, on some courses, visiting university tutors, leads to many students changing or adapting their teaching style. A similar approach could be taken by the RSA/UCLES. Learning packs which contain articles and research which have led to the restructuring of the syllabus could be disseminated amongst centres. Discussions amongst the training team and perhaps with the external assessor could help to clarify problematic areas. "Model" sessions on new areas such as using reference books for language awareness could be accompanied by articles such as Kerr's (1993) suggestions for rethinking language awareness sessions. This kind of approach, which is based on strategy 2, allows trainers to broaden their horizons concerning developments in language learning and teaching and helps them to clarify their opinions and beliefs through discussion; the aim ultimately is to

persuade them that the new syllabus is indeed a change for the better. In cases where trainers are already persuaded that initial teacher training for ELT should not be based solely on a PPP methodology, but are unsure what should replace this, ideas for alternatives will help them to put into practice the change they desire.

#### 5 INTRODUCING TRAINERS

The RSA/UCLES have for some years been running workshops for trainers in Britain, and have recently implemented sessions for those intending to become trainers. However, the provision for trainers who live overseas is sadly lacking; although two Certificate courses are run within three hours of each other in Japan, there has never been a meeting of trainers from each centre; Kuala Lumpur and Singapore are similarly reasonably close, yet organised workshops are rare. A two or three day mini-conference to introduce the new concerns of the Certificate would both allow trainers to voice concerns and the RSA/UCLES to receive valuable feedback. The ties this would create between centres would also be a valuable resource for disseminating information about the new syllabus. Nunan (1989b) has demonstrated how workshops can be run to promote change without threatening the trainer's status; in Appendix B, I offer my own suggestion for a workshop for the introduction of the new syllabus and its implications, hopefully in the same spirit.

#### 7 THE RECURRING QUESTION

Traditionally, in overseas centres, external assessors arrive for a brief two or three day visit to examine the course and consider the candidates. The pressure they are under to see as much as possible, peruse assignments and files of work, and write their reports leaves them little time to discuss points of interest about the course, let alone new developments in the world of TEFL. The usual comment proffered is to the effect of: "You only do two sessions on phonology", or, "Don't you think you should run a session on what trainees have learnt from observations?" This usually leads to a juggling of sessions on the next timetable rather than a fundamental rethink about

what kind of teaching and learning the centre is engaged in. If, however, external assessors were able to spend an extra day or two at the centre for training purposes, a great deal could be achieved in terms of discussing the implications of the revised syllabus. They could either lead informal discussion type sessions based on the concerns of the trainers, or a more formal type of workshop session as outlined above. These discussions could also act as a forum for an exchange of timetables from different centres to help trainers to ascertain the range of subjects that the RSA/UCLES sees as acceptable. As most trainers regard the external assessor as an expert practitioner whom they respect, they would welcome this opportunity for professional development and the exchange of ideas. This would probably count as a strategy 2 initiative, but as the trainers are already be sympathetic to the external assessor, the conditions for successful change using this strategy would be met. This does, of course, assume that assessors are suitably trained and equipped to carry out such developmental work!

### **Conclusion**

The RSA/UCLES through introducing the revised syllabus are undoubtedly expecting centres to develop and update their courses. In order for this to be successful, trainers must be made to feel that they themselves want this change, that they “own” the change. While this seems relatively easy to do for clients of the course in Britain, because of the constraints and traditions overseas, there may be more difficulties. It will require an investment of time, money and thought on the part of the RSA/UCLES to get these changes appreciated and onto courses, but the change could be managed effectively and efficiently if some of the measures outlined above are taken. The biggest mistake would be for the RSA/UCLES to doubt that the revised syllabus will cause major upheavals and uncertainties in centres overseas. Speaking from experience, I know they will.

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Appendix A

**The British Council, Tokyo R.S.A. C.T.E.F.L.A. 1992**

Week	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
1	- Introduction to the centre and course - Readings - Assignments - Visual bank - Review of pre-course task	- Review of pre-course task - Focus for classroom observations - Discussion of video lesson	
2	- Language Learning Experience - Teaching practice Tutorials		N.B. : Observations begin this week
3	- Language Awareness 1 - Determiners - Lesson Planning	- Oral modelling - a PPP lesson - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
4	- Language Awareness 2 - Tense and Aspect - Classroom Management 1	- Lexis 1 - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
5	- Error Correction <b>- Individual Counselling 1</b>	<b>HOLIDAY !!!!!</b>	<b>HOLIDAY !!!!!</b>
6	- Practice 2 - meaningful drills - Classroom Management 2	- Phonology 1 - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
7	- Listening Skills 1 - Practice to Production 1 * making drills communicative * information gap	- Lexis 2 - ways of teaching it - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
8	- Practice to Production 2 * role play * consolidation of the Three P's - Language Awareness 2 - the Future	- Peer Teaching 2 - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback - <b>Workshop</b> - Dealing with authentic materials - Listening Skills 2 - Feedback on readings
9	<b><u>Public Holiday</u></b>	- Language Awareness 3 - modals 1 - TP Tutorials	- TP and Feedback
10	- Language Awareness 4 - modals 2 - Focus on the Learner	- <b>Individual Counselling 2</b> - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
11	- Language Awareness 5 - the Passive - Reading Skills 1	- <b>Special Session</b> <b><u>Bridging the Gap between Initial Teacher Training and Practice</u></b> - Adrian Doff - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback

Week	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
12	Language Awareness 6 - Conditionals - Use of Video	- Reading Skills 2 - TP tutorials  <b>N.B. : Final Date for Assignment to be handed in</b>	- TP and Feedback - <b>Workshop</b> - Phonology 3 - Teaching Young Learners - Writing Skills 1
13	- Writing Skills 2 - Computer Assisted Language Learning	- Peer Teaching 3 - TP tutorials	- TP and Feedback
14	- Songs - TP tutorials	- Testing - Drama	- TP and Feedback
15	Feedback on Observations - Peer Teaching 4	- Coursebook Evaluation - Course Evaluation	- Discretionary Teaching Practice

## ***Appendix B***

### **A Workshop to Introduce the Revised RSA/UCLES CTEFLA Syllabus and its Implications to Overseas Centres**

Before the workshop takes place, trainers are requested to forward example sessions from their courses to the organiser. These will be copied and distributed for discussion later in the session.

#### **1. Welcome and ice - breaker.**

#### **2. What do you hope the new syllabus contains?**

Trainers are divided into groups with syllabus area headings and asked to discuss what they would like to see altered, changed and kept the same in the new syllabus.

#### **3. Comparison in groups**

Each group chooses one syllabus area - methodology, language awareness, the learner etc. They are given a copy of the old syllabus and the relevant area in the revised and asked to compare and find similarities and differences.

Groups then introduce these changes to the full group.

#### **4. Question time**

Expert, if available, takes questions. If not available, questions are compiled to be forwarded to the RSA/UCLES.

#### **5. Lunch**

#### **6. Discussion of previously submitted materials**

Groups form again and discuss the sample sessions that have been submitted earlier in light of the new proposals. Will they be acceptable, or can they be adapted in some way to become more in line with the syllabus? Sessions with revisions are collected and copied for each attending member.

#### **7. Published Materials to make the job easier**

Whole group discussion/dissemination of published materials and RSA/UCLES workshop materials. These should focus especially on areas of increased focus such as "the learner" and "professional development".