Teacher Reaction to and Understanding of
A Task-based Embedded Syllabus in Queensland

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ABSTRACT

In 2000, a new French syllabus was introduced into Queensland schools for years 4-10. The syllabus is unique in that it combines task-based methodology with embedded content. Teachers are quite divided in their support of the syllabus. This study explored two main research questions. Firstly, which groups of teachers use the syllabus and what are the possible reasons for such trends? Secondly, this paper discusses teacher-defined problematic issues relating to the syllabus. The aim of this study is to capture teachers’ voices as they express concerns about and support for the syllabus.

Introduction

The purpose of the study upon which this article is based was to investigate teachers’ reactions to a task-based syllabus, specifically the 2000 Queensland Years 4-10 French syllabus, following its introduction six years earlier. This research concerns itself with determining which groups of teachers are using or not using the syllabus and defining the key features of the syllabus that teachers find problematic.

The overall goal of my research is to explore barriers to successful implementation according to teachers. I have aimed to facilitate the clear expression of teacher opinion in my study through the use of both open ended and multiple choice questions written in language that is accessible to teachers to stimulate accurate reflection on practice. The discussion of the results allows us to go beyond a superficial view of what is happening, attempting to isolate the key factors pertaining to the successful implementation of the syllabus. Two broad questions were investigated in this study, firstly that of who is using the syllabus, in order to determine if there are consistencies amongst groups; secondly that of the teacher-defined problematic issues in regards to the syllabus.

The findings in this study and the subsequent conclusions have serious implications for French teachers in Queensland, and indeed for any teacher who is attempting to implement a task-based program, these results will hold some relevance. While the Queensland syllabus is somewhat distinctive in its approach, being both task-based and embedded, the results are nonetheless significant for teachers using task-based instruction
Teacher Reaction to and Understanding of 
A Task-based Embedded Syllabus in Queensland

(TBI) outside Queensland. Many of the findings relate specifically to teacher reaction to TBI and teacher understanding of the concept of TBI was one of the key issues investigated.

The Queensland French Syllabus
French is taught in a diverse range of contexts in Queensland. Firstly, in Queensland there are three sectors of schooling, with French taught across all: Education Queensland (EQ) schools (Government-run), Independent Education (IE) (operated by independent bodies, often church associations, such as the Anglican Church) and Catholic Education (which has its own education office). Within the Catholic system there are two branches: that run by the dioceses and that of independent Catholic schools.

Currently LOTE (Languages Other Than English) is compulsory for students in years 6-8, with 90 minutes being the minimum weekly mandated amount of language instruction.

The 2000 French syllabus spans grades 4-10 and, as such, has been arranged into three bands of schooling: middle primary (Years 4 and 5), upper primary (Years 6 and 7) and lower secondary (Years 8, 9 and 10). The syllabus caters for students at different stages of language learning by acknowledging that at any point in time, regardless of band of schooling, there could be students in the classroom at any of the four stages of language learning, these being beginner, elementary, lower intermediate and intermediate (QSCC 2000: 10). At the time of its introduction, it was expected that LOTE in Queensland would be compulsory for all students in years 4-10; however, this is not the case. Currently EQ students in years 6-8 should experience compulsory language classes, though there are reportedly a number of schools where this does not occur.

The syllabus is available in two forms: one is a paper copy, and the other is a CD which contains a significant amount of material not included in the paper version of the syllabus. There are many example modules which teachers can adapt to suit their own contexts. Within these modules are provided a multitude of resources and task ideas, as well as suggested teacher language to assist those who need it.

Having outlined the institutional context of the introduction of the syllabus, we now turn our attention to the nature of the syllabus itself. In a broad sense, the Queensland 4-10 Syllabus for LOTE is an analytic syllabus. Nunan describes an analytic syllabus as one where learners are presented with chunks of language which may include structures of varying degrees of difficulty. The starting point for syllabus design is not the grammatical system of the language, but the communicative purposes for which the language is used (1988:28).

Perhaps the most defining feature of analytic syllabuses, as opposed to synthetic syllabuses, is that the target language is presented in “whole chunks at a time, in molar rather than molecular units, without linguistic interference or control” (Crookes & Gass 1993:11). The rationale behind presenting whole chunks of language in this fashion is succinctly defined by Crookes and Gass in their statement of the principles upon which the analytic syllabus is based:
Teacher Reaction to and Understanding of A Task-based Embedded Syllabus in Queensland

(a) the learners' presumed ability to perceive regularities in the input and induce rules and/or (b) the continued availability to learners of innate knowledge of linguistic universals and the ways language can vary, knowledge which can be reactivated by exposure to natural samples of L2 (1993:11).

Based on these assumptions, those being taught using the Queensland Syllabus are presented with “whole chunks” of language.

While the word “task” has been used in the past to mean anything from a cloze exercise to writing an essay, the fundamental element of the “task” in task-based instruction is that it is meaning focused. The definition used to inform the syllabus can be found in Nunan (1989):

the task is a piece of meaning focused work involving learners in comprehending, producing and/or interacting in the target language, and [...] tasks are analysed or categorized according to their goals, input data, activities, settings and roles. (1989:11).

To further enhance this definition, one can draw on Breen who refers to a task as

a springboard for learning work. In a broad sense, it is a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication (Breen 1989:187).

A number of authors (e.g. Crawford 1999, Skehan 1996a, Carr 2005, among others) suggest that another distinctive feature of tasks is that they are comparable to real life language use. Ellis (2003) discusses the link to the real world, asserting that many tasks occurring in the classroom will not be performed outside it. However, he makes the important point that “the kind of language behaviour they [tasks] elicit corresponds to the kind of communicative behaviour that arises from performing real-world tasks” (2003:6). Skehan adds two other features of a task to the above description: “Task completion has some priority, and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome” (1996b:38).

As for embeddedness, the idea of pulling content from other subject areas into the language syllabus comes originally from Widdowson (1979) in his work on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). He states that “a course which prepares students for dealing with English use in scientific communication should present the language not as something in isolation from what the student knows but as an aspect of something with which they are already familiar”(1979:28). This is also the philosophy that underpins the Queensland LOTE Syllabuses. Students are presented with content taken from other subject areas, with which they are already acquainted, and the particular LOTE studied is thus used in order to access this content.

**TBI and Teacher Reaction: Other studies**

TBI is controversial for many reasons, one of which is the challenge to the nature of the fundamental teacher-student relationship (Siu-yin Tong *et al.*:2000). For teachers using a task-based approach, there is a necessity to relinquish control and to “stand back, have faith and let learners get on with their learning” (Scrivener 1996:80). This signifies a substantial change from the role of teacher in a PPP (presentation-practice-production) approach, an approach that has been traditionally adopted by language teachers.
There are few studies that focus on teacher reaction to TBI; however, in those studies accessed, there are several commonalities. It is important to note that the Queensland situation, where content is embedded, is an unusual situation, which thus presents an added dimension not covered in these other studies.

A useful starting point for our survey of teacher reaction is the introduction of the target-oriented curriculum (TOC) in Hong Kong schools, studied by Carless. While the context is significantly different from the Queensland situation, there are, nonetheless, some relevant parallels in teacher opinion on TBI. Carless conducted case studies of three teachers in Hong Kong who were attempting to implement a task-based curriculum. In contrast to Queensland, task-based instruction in Hong Kong takes the form of a ‘weak’ approach (Skehan 1996a) with tasks being similar to the production stage of the PPP method (Carless 2003). Tasks are therefore more structured than in the Queensland situation. A first report (Carless 2001) suggests that there are a number of factors that affect whether or not an innovation is implemented by teachers. In this article, he chooses to discuss three factors of particular relevance to his case study of the implementation of the Target-Oriented Curriculum in Hong Kong: Teacher attitudes, teacher training and teachers’ understanding of the innovation: “If teachers are to implement an innovation successfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and the practice of the proposed change” (Carless 2001:264).

In a second article (Carless 2003), Carless presents six issues of significance in how teachers implemented the TOC, which, I argue, are also relevant to the Queensland situation. These are:

1. Teacher beliefs
2. Teacher understandings
3. The time available
4. The textbook and the topic
5. Preparation and the available resources
6. The language proficiency of students.

In Hong Kong, all three teachers in the study expressed concern with having insufficient time to cover the syllabus and this was exacerbated by the need to include tasks into class time.

Teachers in Hong Kong place great importance on covering the textbook. Results were inconclusive in relation to the effect of different topics on TBI. However, two out of the three teachers in Carless’s study believed topics had an impact on student motivation and therefore on the ease with which task-based instruction could be implemented.

In Carless’s study had a mixed view on this issue, but Carless’s own interpretation is that students with higher ability are able to complete tasks on a wider variety of topics and also have more language at their disposal, thus reducing the time spent on task preparation, and thereby increasing time available for tasks themselves.

Similar findings to those of Carless were reported in a study conducted by Jennings and Doyle (1996) who investigated the implementation of a task-based approach in a small, private English as a Foreign Language school in Ireland. Materials were a key concern, with reference made to the desire for a textbook by the students and the difficulty in locating...
appropriate materials for the course. On a more positive note, higher teacher motivation was reported, as well as increased co-operation between teachers.

In her study of Queensland teachers’ attitudes, conducted prior to the introduction of the syllabus, Crawford predicted how it would be implemented stating: “While respondents share some attitudes and beliefs, there are also considerable differences that are likely to result in very different interpretations of the new syllabus documents” (1999:360). Another prediction relates to teacher proficiency and the effect this would have on uptake of the syllabus:

The new syllabus content will therefore provide a greater challenge to this group (lower proficiency in speaking) both in terms of their need to teach content in the target language and adapt materials to fit the curriculum rather than depend on the textbook (Crawford 1999:374-5).

As can be seen, although there are only a few studies focusing on teacher reaction to TBI, similar issues are raised in each of the studies. We now move to the research questions on which the present paper is based.

Research questions
Two main research questions guided this study: the first aims to determine who is using the syllabus; the object of the second question is to ascertain problematic issues in regards to the syllabus according to teachers.

Methodology
Data were collected via a survey (see Appendix A) distributed to French teachers. The survey aimed to produce quantitative and qualitative data through the use of both multiple choice and open-ended questions and optional comment sections where teachers were given the chance to explain their responses. Two avenues were used for survey distribution: a mail-out to EQ schools known to be teaching French, and an email sent via the MLTAQ (Modern Language Teachers’ Association Queensland) mailing list. An option to complete the survey online or on paper was given to all respondents. In total, 39 surveys were returned. Data collection methods were inspired by Crawford (1999) who used a survey for quantitative data, and focus groups to access qualitative data. The difference in this study is that the survey also aimed to produce qualitative data.

Issues raised in the studies by Carless (2001, 2003) and Jennings & Doyle (1996) formed the basis for many of the survey questions.

Personal details of respondents were collected by questions 1-13, on a multiple choice basis. Question 14 asked respondents to place themselves in one of three groupings: a) using the syllabus in its entirety; b) sampling resources from the syllabus; c) not using the syllabus at all. From there, dependent on choice of grouping, respondents were directed to follow one of three alternate pathways through the survey.

The first pathway was for teachers using the syllabus in its entirety. Question 15 comprised a series of sub-questions around TBI. Respondents were asked first to indicate their response to statements about TBI based on a Likert scale, and then space for additional comments was given for teachers to expand or clarify their responses. Following this, questions 16 through to 20 were multiple-choice questions covering contact with teachers of other key learning areas (KLAs) and target language use in the classroom. Teachers sampling the syllabus resources started answering questions at question 20. Questions 21 to 26 asked
teachers to comment on the resources associated with the syllabus. A mixture of closed and open-ended questions was used in this section; a Likert scale was also again used to elicit teacher opinion on resources. The issue of professional development associated with the syllabus was dealt with by questions 27-29. Teacher opinion on overall strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus were asked in questions 30 and 31. Two more open-ended questions – addressed to all participants – concluded the survey: Question 32 asked teachers about their perceived role as teacher and question 33 asked for a description of an ideal French classroom.

The majority of the surveys were completed online by teachers. However, those received in hard copy were also entered online upon receipt, for ease of data manipulation. The survey program (PHP Surveyor) was created such that percentages were automatically generated for the closed questions. All comments for open-ended questions were collated and printed question by question and then coded to determine trends in teacher responses.2

Results
The following section presents a series of tables showing the survey data. Clearly, only a selection of relevant responses is presented here. Tables 1-4 relate to the first research question (who is using the syllabus?) Results relating to the second research question (teacher-defined problematic issues with the syllabus) are presented in the remaining tables.

Table 1:
Question 14, Do you currently follow the year 4-10 Queensland French Syllabus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in its entirety</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only sample resources</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No I don't follow it at all</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:
Questions 2 & 14, Use of syllabus in EQ and Independent Education (IE) schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>EQ</th>
<th>IE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in its entirety</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only sample resources</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No I don't follow it at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Years 4-10 French Syllabus is mandated for EQ teachers, whereas for those teaching in the Independent sector, the use of the syllabus is at the discretion of the school and/or teacher. There is a clear trend in relation to use of syllabus based on sector (See Tables 1 and 2). Of the IE teachers surveyed (11 in total), there was only one respondent using the syllabus in its entirety, five were sampling and five did not use the syllabus at all. The responses provided by EQ teachers demonstrated greater use of the syllabus, with 15 of a total 27 using the syllabus, ten sampling and only two claiming to be disregarding it altogether.
Table 3:
Questions 3 & 14, Use of syllabus by levels taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Mix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using in its entirety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not using</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level taught also influenced teachers’ support for the syllabus, with greater support in the primary school (see Table 3), the reasons for which will be discussed later.

Table 4:
Questions 12 & 14, Proficiency levels of participants versus use of the syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Using in its entirety</th>
<th>Sampling</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native/Near Native</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A clear pattern emerged in terms of proficiency level and use of the syllabus (see Table 4): those with high proficiency (self reported level of around 4 and above, out of a possible 5) use the syllabus, as do those with lower proficiency (2 and below), while those between do not.

Table 5:
Questions 3 & 15g, The suggested topics in the syllabus are interesting for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were divided about the use of embedded content (see Table 5). Embeddedness received much greater support amongst the primary school respondents who stated that the embedded content was more akin to the regular primary program and held greater relevance for primary students than a program focused on overseas travel, for example. Those opposed tended to refer to irrelevance of subject choice as the main reason for dissatisfaction with embeddedness. Teacher comments about the choice of topics included terms such as
“irrelevant”, “too complex” and “unrealistic”. Some respondents also feared that using content from different KLAs sends a message that LOTE is less valued because it is borrowing content from other subject areas. A number of respondents wanted to do more “culturally appropriate” work, and yet a further negative aspect of embeddedness according to respondents was the feeling that as teachers they were ill-equipped to deal with content from another KLA.

Table 6: Question 21, Do you use the resources supplied on the syllabus CDs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a high level of usage of the supplied resources amongst the respondents, across both primary and secondary, thus providing a sizeable sample group with some familiarity with the materials (see Table 6). A key problem identified by teachers was the language level of the resources (see Table 7). Respondent 15 comments that [the resources] “can be difficult for grade 8 beginners”. A similar sentiment is evident in the comments of respondent 37, “secondary too hard for yr 8 beginners. primary now not age appropriate. younger good”. Given that the syllabus was originally written with the expectation that LOTE would commence in year 4, resources are targeted at a year level beyond where most students would be in the language, frequently making the language employed in the resources too difficult. The reality is that instead of commencing in year four, as was originally intended, most students begin learning a language in either year six or eight. Consequently, they do not have the experience with the language which was the expectation when the syllabus was written. Many teachers also lamented the lack of a textbook, stating convenience and visual appeal as reasons in support of a textbook, among others.

Table 7: Question 22a, The resources are level appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Reaction to and Understanding of A Task-based Embedded Syllabus in Queensland

### Table 8:
**Question 22b, The resources engage the students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher opinion on student engagement with the resources is presented in Table 8. While there were some positive answers to this question, such as that of respondent 18 “the contexts are interesting”, many negative comments were received. “Boring”, “obscure” and “unmotivating” were three adjectives appearing in the comments to this question. While this question deals with the resources, underlying it is teacher attitude towards embeddedness, which receives varying levels of support.

### Table 9:
**Results Summary for Question 15i, The time allocated to LOTE in my school allows enough time for me to teach the current syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two time-related issues impacted on teachers’ uptake of the syllabus. The first was time allocated to teach French and the effect this had on teachers’ willingness, or otherwise, to teach via TBI (see Table 9). The second was the amount of time teachers have available to them for preparation outside of the classroom. Due to a multitude of different scenarios, it is impossible to tabulate the results for question three, time allocated to different year levels. According to the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) guidelines, the minimum mandated allowance for years 6, 7 and 8 LOTE is 90 minutes per week. Of the 39 respondents, there were ten who had classes that did not receive at least 90 minutes per week. Across these respondents, the time deficiency varied extremely, from those who were only 10 minutes under the requirement, to a couple of schools that were struggling with only 30 or 40 minutes of French per week in total. Even within the same school, there were differences in classes at the same level, such as the rather extreme case of respondent 35 who had three classes of year 5, one of which received 30 minutes while the other two had the required 90 minutes per week. This was not an isolated case; respondent 37 also experienced a similar situation with one year seven class allocated the required 90 minutes, and the other only 75 minutes. The great diversity in responses to this question became very apparent upon receipt of a survey with a separate A4 sheet attached detailing an itinerant primary teacher’s time allocations across her four schools.
As can be seen in Table 9 above, time played a part in teacher reaction to the syllabus. A lack of classroom time, but also a lack of preparation time emerged as an issue present in the comments section. One teacher used the comment space to remark on the heavier teaching workload, stating: “The 2000 syllabus makes impossible demands on all teachers. In essence it is asking teachers to conceive of their own course. Professional textbook writers are that- PROFESSIONALS”.

Question 32 asked teachers to describe their role as a teacher. TBI requires the teacher to act as facilitator though if survey results are accurate, many teachers have not moved beyond the conception of teacher as transmitter of knowledge. When asked to describe their role as a teacher, many respondents still spoke in these terms, with only a comparatively small number making mention of being a facilitator (8 out of 39 respondents in total). This is problematic because this is a key component of the task-based methodology.

Discussion
The following section addresses the two research questions outlined earlier in this paper with reference to the results presented in the previous section. A comparison with other research is also made where applicable.

With respect to the first research question, who is using the syllabus?, three clear groups of syllabus users emerged from the survey data. The three factors that had a major impact on use of the syllabus were: sector (EQ versus IE); level taught (primary versus secondary) and teacher proficiency level. I will now discuss each of these groups in turn and why there was support for the syllabus within each of the groups.

Firstly, as can be seen in Table two, EQ teachers had a much higher rate of syllabus use, than their IE counterparts. This follows from the fact that the syllabus is mandated in EQ, but its use is at the discretion of the school in IE. Reasons why teachers may reject the syllabus when faced with a choice are explored by the second research question, discussed below. The fact that there were very few amongst the EQ teachers who admitted to not be using the syllabus at all, compared with five of 11 in IE, is further evidence of the role played by sector.

Regarding level taught, there was greater support for the syllabus amongst primary teachers, as opposed to secondary teachers (see Table 3). There two possible explanations for this trend. Firstly, due to the nature of the primary school classroom where there is much crossover between the different KLA:s, a language syllabus that draws on content from other subject areas is not out of place. Secondly, a syllabus that focuses on traveling within a target country, as is the case of the typical languages curriculum, holds little relevance for most primary school age children. A syllabus with content from other KLA:s is therefore perhaps more relevant and interesting for this age group. Also, secondary LOTE teachers have limited time during which to confer with teachers from other KLA:s due to the nature of secondary schooling, whereas a primary LOTE teacher is much more able to make links to other KLA:s and confer with the regular classroom teacher.

Teacher proficiency also affected support for the syllabus. Those with lower proficiency and higher proficiency were most likely to be using the syllabus (see Table 3), as opposed to those with medium proficiency. The lower proficiency group may be using it because of the support in the form of teacher language and pre-prepared resources. Judging by the high rate of reported use of the suggested teacher language, it would seem the syllabus writers have successfully averted a potential problem for the lower proficiency groups. Those in the upper proficiency group might favour it because of their ability to cope with the high language level and spontaneity of language use needed for the implementation of a task-
based approach. All proficiency level groups mentioned the need to modify the supplied resources.

In addressing the second research question, what are the teacher-defined problematic issues with the syllabus, five main issues emerged: embeddedness; resources; issues with TBI as a methodology; time allocation for languages and lack of shared understanding of the syllabus among teachers. I will discuss each of these issues individually, with reference where appropriate to Carless (2003).

The use of embedded content (such as ancient wonders, legends, or endangered animals) was a key problem for many survey respondents, particularly secondary school LOTE teachers (see Table 5). Most non-native speaker teachers would have learnt French by the communicative method, where content was linked to the target culture and so the use of content derived from other KLAs represents quite a shift explaining why some teachers view the topics as irrelevant if the criteria they use to judge are based on their own learning experience. Others reject embeddedness on the grounds of wanting to do more culturally appropriate work, but this notion actually indicates a lack of understanding of embeddedness. Embedded content, like any content, still needs to be situated in a culturally appropriate context. Some teachers felt they did not have sufficient expertise in the suggested topics and this indicates a lack of understanding about the intentions of the syllabus writers. Teachers are free to choose topics as appropriate to their situation, and the topics are not intended as in-depth treatments of the subject matter, but rather a relevant context for language use. With a better understanding of embeddedness among teachers, it may well be that there would be greater support for this approach.

There was a high level of usage of the syllabus resources (see Table 6). Data on teacher reaction to resources was collected on two issues: appropriateness of the language level (Table 7) and teacher opinion on whether the resources engage the students (Table 8). The latter is closely linked to teacher reaction to embeddedness (see above) as the very nature of the resources is significantly different from traditional language courses. In terms of language level of the resources, there was a general feeling that the language level was pitched too high. As explained earlier, when the syllabus was written, it was expected that students would study LOTE commencing in year 4. The reality is that most learners start in year 6, with many beginning in year 8 and teachers are attempting to use resources written for students with supposedly several years prior study in the language. It is not unexpected to find that language level of students and resources is mismatched given this scenario.

From the survey data for question 32 (see results section), as well as the various comments arising lamenting the lack of textbook use, it can seen that TBI itself may be problematic for some teachers. TBI requires teachers to relinquish control up to a certain point, and become facilitator, in stark contrast to traditional textbook learning. The lack of awareness of the change in teacher role required of TBI is further evidence for teachers’ lack of shared understanding, discussed below.

Time allocated to LOTE did not seem to be a key reason for acceptance or rejection of the syllabus, despite considerable variation across schools; however, it did emerge nonetheless as a concern among teachers. This reminds us of Carless’ (2003) findings, as all three teachers in his study expressed concern with having insufficient time to cover the syllabus, a problem exacerbated by the need to include tasks in class time in addition to covering the regular requirements for assessment. In the Queensland situation, where tasks form the basis of the syllabus, and are not in addition to it, the issue is slightly different. It is a matter of whether or not there is sufficient class time to effectively teach via task-based instruction.

Another issue common to both this study and that of Carless (2003) is the time teachers have for preparation. Clearly, based on survey results, Queensland teachers feel
there is a real need for adaptation and supplementation of the resources needed to teach the 2000 syllabus, which takes a significant amount of time. Carless (2003) raises a similar point in his study of teachers in Hong Kong, saying that the reason some of the teachers prefer to use a textbook is lack of time to prepare the materials necessary for TBI. Location of appropriate materials for TBI is also cited as a problem for the subjects in the study by Jennings and Doyle (1996).

Overall, from the results of the survey it became apparent that there is a significant lack of shared understanding about what constitutes “using the syllabus” and indeed TBI itself, with seemingly very few in this sample implementing the syllabus as the creators intended. While teachers claim to be using the syllabus, there are various interpretations of this, which incidentally becomes a problem for uniformity between different schools. Many teachers’ concepts of language does not seem to have moved beyond the idea of language as a system to be learnt, which explains the problem many teachers are having with implementing this syllabus. Comments from teachers such as “covering the vocabulary” and “sentence patterns” show very clearly that many teachers are still viewing language as a system to be learnt. It is not possible to use this syllabus as outlined in the syllabus document if language is still viewed in this way.

This lack of shared understanding concerning implementation of the syllabus was a very significant finding and is, essentially, at the very heart of the issue of teachers’ problems with implementation. The findings in my study are consistent with predictions made by Crawford (1997) who expected that there would be inconsistency in teacher interpretation of the syllabus.

Conclusion
This study differs from many others in that it is teacher focused, presenting teachers’ views on the use of the syllabus at the classroom level. It may be useful in future research to investigate student reactions to the syllabus, as a complement to this study.

The main findings of this research are that there are currently several barriers to implementation of a task-based, embedded syllabus according to teachers: teachers with low proficiency experience difficulties implementing a task-based syllabus; the use of embedded content is problematic for many teachers; teachers are often dissatisfied with the resources designed specifically for the Queensland Syllabus; TBI as a methodology in itself is problematic to some teachers due to the change in the nature of teacher role to that of facilitator and time allocations both in the classroom and preparation time affect teacher attitude towards TBI.

Recommendations based on the findings include revised wording in the syllabus document in order for there to be a greater shared understanding of the expected methodology. A renewed round of professional development could also help facilitate shared understanding amongst teachers. Opportunity for teacher collaboration in the creation of resources, or possibly whole units, was suggested by some respondents.

This syllabus was introduced with great gusto: good funding, a strong introductory professional development program and support materials. The methodology is based on sound theoretical principles of second language acquisition. Unfortunately, enthusiasm for the syllabus did not endure, and within a short while support was waning. While there are some contextual factors which present difficulties to implementing the syllabus as intended, the main issue causing lack of support is the absence of understanding what is expected. With some revisions to the syllabus document and efforts made to reach a shared understanding among teachers, as well as a context more conducive to TBI, this situation can begin to be resolved.
REFERENCES


NOTES

1 The definition appeared in the environmental scan conducted by the Queensland School Curriculum Council in 1997 (QSCC: 1997).
2 After analysis of the survey data, questions for focus group sessions were devised, aiming to discuss some issues further, however the data for focus groups are not presented in this article.
3 “Independent Education” also encompasses those Independent Catholic schools which have a choice as to whether or not the syllabus is used.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER SURVEY

TEACHER INFORMATION

1. (Please tick appropriate box) □ Male □ Female

2. In which system are you currently employed?
   □ Education Qld    □ Catholic Education □ Independent Education

3. Please indicate a) How many French classes you teach at each level
   b) How much contact time is there for each of those classes in your school per week.

   Year levels   How many classes do you teach   How many minutes per week does each class receive (eg. Year 7-70 minutes)
   (eg. 2 x year 4 or 1 x year 4 and 1x year 6)
   Years 4-6                      minutes
   Year 7                      minutes
   Year 8                      minutes
   Year 9/10                    minutes
   Year 11/12                   minutes

4. In relation to your entire teaching load, approximately what percentage is comprised of French?
   □ 25% □ 50% □ 75% □ 100%

5. Please indicate in which age group you belong.
   □ 20-30 □ 30-40 □ 40-50 □ 50+

6. How many years have you been teaching? (Please write total teaching experience, even if not French and please round to nearest year) __________ years

7. How many years have you been teaching French? (Please round to nearest year)
   __________ years
8. Do you teach any other subjects? Please specify.

_______________________________________________________________________

9. Please write your LOTE qualifications, if any.

_______________________________________________________________________

10. Please indicate which group describes you.

☐ Native speaker  ☐ Background Speaker  ☐ Neither

11. Have you spent a time greater than 2 months in a French speaking country?

☐ Yes (please specify how long) _______________  ☐ No

12. How would you rate your own French proficiency? Please rate yourself by ticking the appropriate box for each macroskill based on the scale given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Reasonable</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Native or near native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Scale taken from Crawford 1999

13. Did you use the 1988 French syllabus?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not teaching French

14. Do you currently follow the year 4-10 Queensland French Syllabus?
Teacher Reaction to and Understanding of
A Task-based Embedded Syllabus in Queensland

☐ Yes, in its entirety
☐ I only sample resources (PLEASE GO DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 20)
☐ No, I don’t follow it at all
If not using the syllabus, please briefly indicate why.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________

(PLEASE GO DIRECTLY TO QUESTION 32)

15. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following based on the scale below. (Please circle appropriate response) Space has been made for optional comments and issues you may wish to raise regarding the syllabus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1- strongly agree</th>
<th>2- agree</th>
<th>3- disagree</th>
<th>4- strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Students are enthusiastic about task-based education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) I enjoy teaching a task-based syllabus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) The move to a more learner-centered syllabus is beneficial for students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) My students have the necessary skills to deal with a learner-centered syllabus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) When working on tasks, students spend the majority of time engaged in work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) When working on tasks, many students are frequently off task unless they are being individually monitored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G) The suggested topics in the syllabus are interesting for students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H) I have sufficient general knowledge to teach the topics in the 2000 Syllabus
Comments ________________________________

I) The time allocated to LOTE in my school allows enough for time for me to teach the current syllabus
Comments ________________________________

J) There is sufficient focus on form in the 2000 syllabus
Comments ________________________________

K) A task-based embedded syllabus, such as the current Qld 4-10 French syllabus, puts a higher demand on teachers’ language skills than a textbook course
Comments ________________________________

L) I feel that I am adequately prepared for my role as facilitator in the 2000 syllabus
Comments ________________________________

M) Overall, I feel the 2000 Syllabus is working well in my situation
Comments ________________________________

16. Do you ever confer with teachers from other Key Learning Areas regarding topics to be taught in French? □ Yes □ No

17. Do you feel that a high French proficiency is necessary to be able to effectively teach the current syllabus? □ Yes □ No

18. Do you ever refer to the suggested teacher language supplied on the syllabus CDs?
□ Always □ Sometimes □ Never

19. Do you feel that a teacher with limited proficiency would be able to successfully teach the 2000 syllabus using the materials and sample language supplied on the CD?
□ Yes □ No

20. Has your use of French in the classroom increased since implementing the 2000 syllabus? □ Yes □ No

21. Do you use the resources supplied on the syllabus CDs?
□ Frequently □ Occasionally □ Rarely
22. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following based on the scale below. (Please circle appropriate response) Space has been made for optional comments you may wish to add.

1- strongly agree  2- agree  3- disagree  4- strongly disagree

A) The resources are level appropriate

Comments __________________________________________________________

B) The resources engage the students

Comments __________________________________________________________

C) I need to add many additional resources to what is supplied

Comments __________________________________________________________

D) I have access to sufficient resources to teach the 2000 syllabus

Comments __________________________________________________________

23. Have you been informed of the existence of the resource kits created to complement the modules of the syllabus which are available from the Qld LOTE Centre?

☐ Yes ☐ No

24. Do you use the aforementioned LOTE centre kits? ☐ Yes ☐ No

25. What do you see as the strengths associated with the resources supplied on the syllabus CDs?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

26. What do you see as weaknesses in terms of resources?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

27. Have you had any training in the implementation of the Years 4-10 French syllabus, including pre-service education? ☐ Yes ☐ No
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>28.</th>
<th>If professional development sessions in the implementation of the 2000 French Syllabus were offered, would you be interested in attending? □ Yes □ No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Is there anything specific that you would like to see covered in professional development sessions for the 2000 syllabus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Overall, in your opinion, what are the strengths of the year 4-10 Qld French syllabus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>What do you see to be the weaknesses of the current syllabus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>How would you describe your role as teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Please describe your idea of an ideal French classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Are you willing to be contacted to chat further regarding these issues? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please provide contact details:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>