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978-0-521-80491-2 - Curriculum Development in Language Teaching

Jack C. Richards

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*Jack C. Richards*

Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization

Regional Language Centre, Singapore



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## *Series editor's preface*

The activities of language teaching have often been viewed from a very narrow perspective. This is evident from the fascination with teaching methods that has characterized the history of language teaching until relatively recently. Methods have often been regarded as the most important factor in determining the success of a language program, and advances in language teaching have sometimes been seen as being dependent on the adoption of the latest method. A perspective often missing from the method-based view of teaching is that of how methods interact with other factors in the teaching-learning process. Who are the learners and the teachers? What expectations do they have for the program? What learning and teaching styles do they bring to the program? For what purposes is the language needed? What goals does the program have, and how are these goals expressed? In what settings will teaching take place, and what organizational structure is in place to support and maintain good teaching? What resources will be used, and what are their roles? What is the role of textbooks and other materials? What measures will be used to determine the success of the program? Choice of teaching method cannot therefore be made unless a great deal is known about the context for the language program and the interactions between the different elements involved. It is this perspective that characterizes a curriculum-based approach to language teaching.

This book presents an approach to the teaching-learning process that sees successful language as being dependent upon the activities of curriculum development, that is, the use of a variety of planning and implementation processes involved in developing or renewing a language program. These processes include determining learners' needs, analysis of the context for the program and consideration of the impact of contextual factors, the planning of learning outcomes, the organization of a course or set of teaching materials, the selection and preparation of teaching materials, provision for and maintenance of effective teaching, and evaluation of the program. These elements constitute a set of interrelated elements, and their nature and function form the focus of this book. The book seeks to survey key issues and practices within language curriculum development in order to provide the

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basis for more effective planning and decision making in language program development, implementation, and review. I hope that teachers and other language teaching professionals will find that this book helps them better understand and use the skills involved in developing effective language programs.

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## *Preface*

Like many language teaching professionals, I entered the field of language teaching as a classroom teacher, anticipating that as I accumulated experience and professional knowledge, I would become a better teacher. As many others have discovered, however, I soon came to realize that being an effective teacher meant much more than becoming a more skillful and knowledgeable classroom practitioner. It meant learning how to develop and adapt materials, to plan and evaluate courses, to adapt teaching to students' needs, and to function within an institutional setting. It became clear that effective teaching was dependent on understanding the context for teaching, the needs of teachers and learners, the careful planning of courses and materials, as well as the monitoring of teaching and learning. In short, it was necessary to try to understand teaching as a part of an interrelated set of factors and processes that are often referred to as curriculum development.

This book seeks to describe and examine the processes of curriculum development in language teaching in order to acquaint language teachers and teachers-in-training with fundamental issues and practices in language curriculum development. Curriculum development is an essentially practical activity since it seeks to improve the quality of language teaching through the use of systematic planning, development, and review practices in all aspects of a language program. The book tries to provide as many examples as possible of how some of the practical problems in language program development have been addressed by practitioners in many parts of the world. At the same time, the practices employed in developing and renewing language programs themselves reflect ongoing theories and developments in language teaching pedagogy, second language acquisition theory, educational theory, and related fields; hence the book also seeks to highlight important theoretical issues that can have a significant impact on language curriculum practices.

The book is planned for use in in-service courses and workshops as well as to provide a sourcebook for teachers, program administrators, and other language teaching professionals. The book as a whole examines the key processes in curriculum development, including needs analysis, planning

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goals and outcomes, course planning, teaching, materials development, and evaluation. In the earlier chapters, I have provided a historical perspective on how the field of curriculum development in language teaching has evolved, since I believe it is important for language teaching professionals to have some sense of the history of the issues that have shaped the development of language teaching. The subsequent chapters seek to survey key issues related to curriculum development issues and processes, illustrating different points of view and providing detailed practical examples by way of illustration. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter provide opportunities for further reflection and application of some of the issues discussed.

The book reflects my own 30 years of experience as a teacher, teacher educator, program director, and materials writer in many different parts of the world. Any expertise I can claim to have in curriculum development is a result of learning through the practical experience of developing curriculum and materials and directing language programs. My initial explorations in language curriculum development took me from New Zealand, where I received my initial teacher training, to Quebec, where I completed my doctoral research in syllabus design with W. F. Mackey in the 1970s. Subsequently, I have spent periods of time in universities and teacher training centers in Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Hawaii, and New Zealand, working in all aspects of language teaching from curriculum and materials development, to teaching, to program administration. I have also served as a consultant to a number of curriculum projects and institutions in different parts of the world. A recent 10-year annual consultancy with the Ministry of Education of the Sultanate of Oman also provided an invaluable opportunity to provide input to curriculum and materials development projects at a national level. At the same time, experience as a writer of commercial language teaching materials with a worldwide market has provided opportunities to work regularly with teachers and teacher trainers in more than twenty countries, an experience that has given additional perspectives on problems involved in developing and using teaching materials. In recent years I have been in the pleasant position of being able to divide my time between classroom teaching, teacher training, and writing, from the congenial environment provided by the Regional Language Center in Singapore, whose unique library resources and materials collection proved invaluable during the preparation of this book.

Earlier versions of this book have been used in postgraduate and in-service courses at the University of Arizona in the United States; the University of Auckland, New Zealand; the National Institute of Education, Singapore; the Regional Language Center, Singapore; and the SEAMEO Regional

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