

Curriculum Development in Language Teaching (2nd Ed.)

JACK C. RICHARDS

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REVIEWED BY MEREDITH MACAULAY

With a shift towards offering more specialised English courses, such as direct entry EAP courses and Vocational English, many institutes are creating in-house materials to meet their learners' needs rather than relying on a commercial coursebook syllabus. As a result, there is a corresponding need for teams of teachers who understand the underlying principles of best practice in curriculum development. This second edition of *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* could certainly help meet this need. Within its 338 pages and 11 chapters, this up-to-date, research-based book provides interested readers with everything they should know about this area.

Reading like a coursebook, each chapter of *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* builds on the next. Chapter 1, 'The Nature of Curriculum,' introduces the reader to different conceptions of curriculum including the traditional product approach, 'a framework developed to monitor teaching' (p. 3) as well as the process approach, reflecting recent research into the 'emergence' of curriculum through the process of teaching and learning. The next two chapters look at the history of course design (Chapter 2) and bring us forward to 'New Directions in Syllabus and Curriculum Design' (Chapter 3). These chapters examine the shift from using vocabulary and grammar as the driving force of a course towards a more communicative and purpose-based approach, taking into consideration the language aims of learners and their target contexts. The remaining chapters examine key stages and considerations in the curriculum development process, including needs analysis, formulating aims and outcomes, course planning, implementation of the curriculum, and approaches to evaluation.

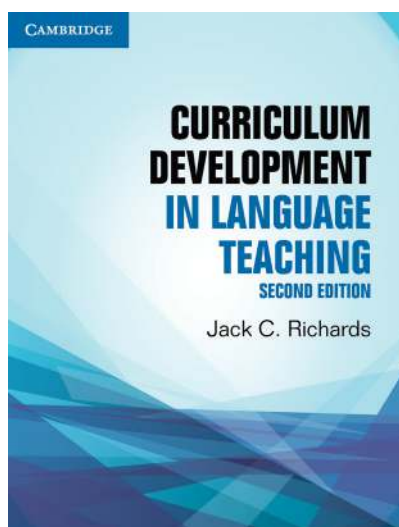
Each chapter is subdivided with headings, allowing the reader to digest manageable chunks of information, and there are discussion questions throughout to encourage

reflection. There is also a page of discussion questions and suggested activities at the end of each chapter, which would enable the book to be used in a teacher training course or workshop, or with a discussion group. Each chapter also includes an appendix with one or two (and sometimes three) examples of documents linked to the chapter's theme, such as needs analysis tools, proficiency descriptors like the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, and examples of syllabi for the course planning section. While some of these documents could be useful as models, perhaps some of them could have been omitted or at least condensed. There did not seem to be a clear purpose, for example, for having three different vocabulary frequency lists, including the entire Academic Word List.

More useful than the appendices is the inclusion of real case studies of curricula developed by teachers around the world. These case studies, which are new to this second edition of the book, illustrate how practitioners have used principles of curriculum design to create unique courses. Via discussion questions, readers are asked to analyse each case (sometimes comparing two cases) with respect to a particular concept, such as a using a text-based approach or addressing

learner needs, and to evaluate how challenges were overcome. A wide range of courses are represented, including an English course for baristas, a course on discussion skills and several different Academic English courses. Curriculum teams could use these case studies to evaluate some of their own course-design decisions and also to gain ideas.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this new edition is its currency, with every chapter having been revised to reflect contemporary issues. Two such issues centre around the use of textbooks and technology, and both are addressed in Chapter 9. This chapter evaluates textbooks as teaching resources and offers teachers who are required to use textbooks useful guidelines for adapting material to their own contexts, such as by modifying, adding or deleting content, addressing omissions or extending tasks. In addition, Richards provides clear and current research-based arguments for augmenting a curriculum with technology. He outlines how technology can support the learner, the teacher and the institution and gives examples of how certain tools and applications (e.g., mobile devices, social media and learning management systems) have been integrated into a syllabus with specific learning



goals. Richards stresses, however, that certain issues must be considered with any technology integration, such as infrastructure requirements, the skill level of teachers and students, and the need for professional development.

I personally found Chapter 5, 'Context and the Curriculum,' to be insightful, relevant and grounded in the most current research. It emphasises the importance of considering the sociocultural environment of a curriculum that comprises the learners, teachers and institution. This chapter presents some real examples of curriculum projects (in Japan and Malaysia, among others) which did not succeed because the context of the learners or teachers was not well considered. The chapter concludes by proposing 'curriculum adoption factors' (e.g., perceived advantages and alignment with current practices) and by highlighting the importance of piloting or implementing curriculum changes on a small scale at first to detect problems and find solutions. This is advice which should be considered carefully by all curriculum teams and administrators.

This second edition of *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* is a must for all language institutes and educators who are involved with, or simply interested in, curriculum development. It contains something for everyone, even the most experienced. There is an excellent table of contents and index, which will help readers navigate the book's plethora of information – particularly if they know what they are looking for. Because of its textbook style and depth of information, the book could also be well exploited in a postgraduate TESOL course. Novice course writers or teachers would benefit from reading the chapters in sequence, discussing the principles in groups and putting what they have learnt into practice, perhaps by doing practical project work with others. A highly recommended resource.

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