6
Materials Design in Language Teacher Education: An Example from Southeast Asia

Jack C. Richards

Introduction and overview

This chapter describes an approach that has been developed to induct language teachers into the principles and practices involved in writing course materials for use in countries that are members of SEAMEO – the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization. SEAMEO hosts a number of centres in member countries, each with a particular focus and mandate. The SEAMEO centre in Singapore is under the auspices of the Singapore Ministry of Education and is known as the Regional Language Centre (RELC). Among the courses RELC provides to teachers and teacher educators from the ten SEAMEO member countries are in-services courses and workshops on topics such as CLIL, ESP, and English for Young Learners, as well as courses linked to postgraduate qualifications, taught in both face-to-face and blended formats. In its earlier years RELC lecturers were sponsored by both Singapore as well by member or associate-member countries and I was the New Zealand Government staff member on two occasions. More recently I have been an adjunct professor at RELC, visiting RELC annually to teach courses and workshops on curriculum and materials design. This paper describes an approach I have developed while working with course participants in this capacity.

The context and setting

Although participants in the RELC courses come from countries with very different histories, cultures, economies, and educational traditions, English plays a prominent role in each country. In some member countries such as Singapore and the Philippines, English is widely used in many different domains in society, including education, the media, and government. In others (e.g. Cambodia, Vietnam) its status varies and may have more restricted uses in society outside of its role as a school subject. Common to each country, however, is a substantial

use of textbooks and commercially published materials to support the teaching of English. Typically when asked to estimate the proportion of class time which is dependent upon the use of textbooks and commercial materials, teachers in RELC courses cite figures as high as 80–90%. The level of teacher engagement with materials varies according to the contexts in which the participants work. Some may be involved in the development or revision of textbooks and materials in their ministry of education or institution, as was the case with a recent group of teachers from Cambodia who were involved with the revision of secondary school English coursebooks. Many are users of materials produced by others but often find they need to adapt materials to their local teaching context. Many, however, work in contexts where no published materials are available and need to develop materials for a course with a very specific local context. Projects such as "a course for tourist police officers in Indonesia," "a reading course for environmental science majors in Vietnam," and "a course on classroom language for Thai teachers of English" are recent examples of this kind.

The participants in RELC courses are typically of different levels of language proficiency. Some (such as teachers from Singapore, Philippines or Malaysia) are "native-speaker" users of English if judged by their language proficiency and knowledge. Others may be much less proficient in English. All, however, are experienced English teachers, familiar with teaching in varied circumstances. Those with limitations in terms of proficiency typically report a greater use of textbooks and commercial materials in their teaching. Against this background I have sought to develop ways of engaging teachers in understanding how materials work, the design principles they reflect, and the procedures materials developers use in preparing materials and course books. The goal of these activities has thus been to help teachers develop the knowledge and skills they can use in preparing or adapting materials for their own teaching contexts. The course itself is generally delivered over several weeks, or in the shortened form of an intensive one or two week workshop. The pedagogy I make use of involves a series of stages moving from consciousness raising, modelling, guided creation, to individual creation and seeks to develop a creative approach to materials' development.

The innovation

Experiencing a coursebook-based lesson

To initiate the process I take the role of classroom teacher, the participants become language learners, and I teach them a unit from a course book following the suggestions given in the teacher's book for how it is intended to be used. I usually teach a 60–90 minute lesson from an integrated-skills international course book such as *Interchange* or *Headway*. Following the lesson experience, the participants form small groups to review the lesson and their experience of

it. In their groups they first reflect on the kinds of activities they experienced, what they liked or didn't like about them, and what they thought were the strengths or weaknesses of the unit. They consider questions such as these:

- What kinds of language use did the unit practise?
- What specific learning outcomes did the material deliver?
- Was there adequate scaffolding of tasks?
- Did you experience any difficulties with any of the activities?
- Would the material work with a mixed level class?
- How engaging were the activities?
- If you were to use this material, would you need to adapt or modify it?

I then ask them to examine the coursebook unit itself and to answer these questions:

- What are the aims and objectives of the unit?
- What syllabus strands does it contain (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking)?
- What is the format or structure of the unit and how is it organized?
- What different kinds of exercises or activities does the unit contain?
- What is the purpose of each exercise?

Answering these questions is not as straightforward as it appears, since although the materials developer may have had a clear purpose in mind for each exercise and for the overall design of the unit, this may not be immediately apparent. For example, in a unit from my own series *Interchange Level 1* that I used for this purpose recently, it was not apparent to a number of the participants that the unit was organized around two linked lessons, that conversations in each lesson were used to present grammar in context, followed by a grammar activity that moved from controlled practice to communicative practice and that the pronunciation activities either served to highlight a pronunciation feature in a subsequent activity or to review something that had occurred earlier in the unit.

Examining the pedagogic design of units from a course book

Participants then examine and compare a variety of units from published materials, both at the macro- and micro-level. The purpose of this activity is to familiarize participants with the formats used to organize units in coursebooks (macro-level) as well as to identify and critique exercise types used to present and practise different language features and skills (micro-level).

In reviewing the overall design of a unit the participants explore these questions:

- What is the theme for the unit?
- What are its learning outcomes?
- What syllabus components does it contain?
- How is the material in the unit sequenced?
- What design resources does it make use of, such as diagrams, photographs and art?
- What kind of progression does the unit reflect?
- What grouping arrangements does it make use of?
- How much time would it take to teach?

We then move to a more micro-level analysis of the materials, exploring both the types of exercises and activities used in the unit, their purpose, and their effectiveness. The first stage in this process often requires some degree of inventiveness on the part of the participants, since they need to agree on a terminology that can be used to identify and quantify the different kinds of exercises the materials make use of. In the case of the *Interchange* series, one group of participants looked at each labelled activity across one level of the series (e.g. exercises labelled *Snapshot*, *Word Power*, *Conversation*, *Grammar Focus* etc), described the purpose of each activity type (e.g. schema building, vocabulary review and presentation, presenting grammar in context), as well as the different exercise types used for each activity throughout the series.

   This activity is descriptive in its focus and is followed by activities that may require both description and evaluation. Check-lists and similar documents are useful at this stage. For example, in examining grammar-focused activities, the distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice can be used:

- *Mechanical practice* refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practise use of particular grammatical or other items.
- *Meaningful practice* refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practise the use of prepositions to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as *across from, on the corner of, near, on, next to*. They then have to answer questions such as "Where is the book shop? Where is the café?" etc. The practice is now *meaningful* because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map.
- *Communicative practice* refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information

is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example, students might have to draw a map of their neighbourhood and answer questions about the location of different places in their neighbourhood, such as *the nearest bus stop, the nearest café*, etc.

If the participants are interested in developing materials for a specific skill area, criteria for activities in that skill area can be used. For example, Thornbury (2005) lists six criteria for a speaking activity, summarized as follows:

- Productivity: it provides conditions for autonomous language use
- Purposefulness: it has a clear outcome, especially one which requires learners to work together to achieve a common purpose
- Interactivity: it requires learners to take into account the effect they are having on their audience
- Challenge: it stretches their available communicative resources
- Safety: it does not involve too much risk or likelihood of failure
- Authenticity: it bears some relation to real-life language use

In the case of reading skills I found two resources useful in considering the design of reading activities. The first is Grellet's classic *Developing Reading Skills* (Grellet, 1983), which contains a useful and very extensive classification of reading activities and exercises, many of which are very creative. I select examples from her classification and ask the participants to try to identify what their purpose is. Here is an example:

This activity practices bottom-up processing, that is, using syntactic cues to identify the meaning of a complex sentence.

Read the sentence and complete the task that follows:

Magazine writers, or the authors of books about current affairs, often find themselves gratefully surprised by how much remains unexplored and untold about major events that the day press and television once swarmed all over, then abandoned.

Find the subjects in the first column that match the verbs in the second column,

a) Magazine writers	A) find
b) books	B) remains
c) current affairs	C) swarmed
d) how much	D) abandoned
e) major events	
f) the day press and television	

Another activity that is useful in thinking about the design of reading exercises is Barrett's widely cited taxonomy of levels of comprehension, (Hudson, 2007: 85) which identifies five different levels of understanding. These are referred to as *literal comprehension* (concern with information stated explicitly in the text); *reorganization* (analyzing, synthesizing and organizing information that has been stated explicitly); *inferential comprehension* (using information explicitly stated, along with one's own personal experience, as a basis for conjecture and hypothesis); *evaluation* (judgements and decisions concerning value and worth); and *appreciation* (psychological and aesthetic impact of the text on the reader). This taxonomy is useful because it reminds us that not all texts require the same level of understanding or are read in the same way. It also influences the design of reading materials, since tasks that seek to teach or assess literal comprehension may be different from those that are used to teach or assess appreciation. In class I give the participants authentic texts from different genres and ask them a) to first identify an appropriate level of comprehension in reading the text; and b) to develop reading activities that involve the relevant level of comprehension.

If the participants are interested in designing materials for the teaching of writing, I find Hyland's classifications of second language writing tasks very useful (Hyland, 2003). Hyland identifies five aspects of writing – content, system, process, genre, and context – and provides examples of activities that address one or more aspect. Before showing how Hyland links tasks to the five aspects of writing, I ask the participants to try to do so themselves. For example, some of the task-types on Hyland's taxonomy are:

Extract information from a written text
Combine sentences
Practice construction of simple and complex sentences
Compare texts with different purposes
Practice specific rhetorical patterns
Revise a draft in response to comments

The course members might then review an ESL/EFL writing text to see what features of writing are addressed and what task-types are used.

In addition to considering the kinds of activities and exercises that can be used with different kinds of materials, we also consider how engaging or creative such activities are. This aspect of materials is obviously difficult to evaluate objectively, but it is something that teachers, as well as learners, often appreciate in classroom materials. Some of the features that Dörnyei (2001) identifies as "productive language learning tasks" can also be seen as reflective creative responses to task design:

Challenge: tasks in which learners solve problems, discover something, overcome obstacles, or find information;

Interesting content: topics that students already find interesting and that they would want to read about outside of class, such as stories we find about sports and entertainment personalities we find on YouTube and the internet;

The personal element: activities that make connections to the learners' lives and concerns;

The novelty element: aspects of an activity that are new or different or totally unexpected;

The intriguing element: tasks that concern ambiguous, problematic, paradoxical, controversial, contradictory or incongruous material and stimulate curiosity;

Individual choice: tasks which give students a personal choice. For example, students can choose their own topics to write about in an essay or choose their own topics and group members in a discussion activity;

Tasks that encourage risk taking: tasks that stretch learners resources without frustrating them;

Tasks that encourage original thought: activities that require an original response. So instead of comprehension questions after a reading passage that test recall, they seek to use tasks that encourage a personal and individual response to what the student has read;

The fantasy element: activities that engage the learners' fantasy and that invite the learners to use their imagination for creating make-believe stories, identifying with fictional characters or acting out imaginary situations.

This list is used for activities in which teachers examine activities and tasks from course materials to see if they can adapt them to make them more creative. For example, in a recent course teachers adapted a reading exercise that in its original form consisted of a text followed by comprehension questions, to one which became a jigsaw reading task followed by a role-play activity.

Developing a rationale for the design of materials

In developing materials for any aspect of language learning, whether it be a skill-based course in listening, speaking, reading or writing or an integrated-skills basic series, the materials developers' beliefs about teaching and learning will have a major impact on materials' design, since it will play a role in determining the goals the writer sets for the materials, the focus of the materials themselves and the activities they make use of. Materials' developers draw on knowledge of research and theory as well as beliefs and principles in planning a course. In planning materials for the teaching of writing for example, the materials developer could start from any of a number of views of the nature of writing or of texts. He or she could start from a view of written language that

focuses on *writing-modes*, i.e. the organizational modes underlying paragraphs and essays, such as definition, comparison-contrast, classification, or cause-effect. Alternatively the materials' developer might start from a *genre or text-based view* of written language in which texts such as news reports, business letters, or academic articles are seen to reflect their use in particular contexts. Or the writer could begin from a *process perspective* in which written texts are seen to reflect the cognitive and composing processes that go into their creation, such as prewriting, planning, drafting, composing, reviewing, revising, and editing.

If on the other hand one were preparing a listening course the materials developer would need to clarify his or her understanding of the nature of listening. Is it viewed largely as a process of decoding input? Is it viewed in terms of the mastery of discrete listening skills and sub-skills? Or it is seen as a blend of top-down and bottom-up processing? For a speaking course likewise a starting point is selecting an appropriate theory or model of the nature of oral interaction. Will it be based on a model of communicative competence and seek to address grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence? Or is oral communication viewed more in terms of speech act theory focusing on utterances as functional units in communication and dependent upon the performance of speech acts?

The materials developer will also need to consider the complementary question of the theory of language learning underlying the materials, since this will determine how the syllabus is implemented in the form of exercises, tasks, activities and learning experiences. Particular language models are often linked to particular views of learning. For example, a text-based approach to the teaching of writing is often linked to a Vygotskian view of learning based on the notion of scaffolding (Lantolf, 2000). The teacher and the learners are viewed as engaged in a collaborative problem-solving activity with the teacher providing demonstrations, support, guidance and input and gradually withdrawing these as the learner becomes increasingly independent. Models of good writing are employed and writing (or more correctly, text construction) is taught through a process of deconstruction, modelling, and joint elaboration and reconstruction as students create their own texts. The theory of learning underlying approaches to the teaching of conversation might be based on a somewhat different view of learning. It could reflect an interactionist view of language acquisition based on the hypothesis that language acquisition requires or greatly benefits from interaction, communication, and especially negotiation of meaning, which happens when interlocutors attempt to overcome problems in conveying their meaning, resulting in both additional input and useful feedback on the learners' own production.

The materials developer may also seek to reflect a particular philosophy or teaching and learning in the materials, one based on a specific educational

approach such as "collaborative learning" "communicative approach" or "learner centredness," as we see in these statements of principles underlying a secondary school English course:

- There is a consistent focus throughout on learning English in order to develop practical and functional skills, rather than as an end in itself.
- Students are engaged in practical tasks that relate to real-world uses of English.
- Realistic and communicative uses of English are given priority.
- Maximum use is made of pair and group activities in which students complete tasks collaboratively.
- There is an appropriate balance between accuracy-focused and fluency-focused activities.
- Teachers serve as facilitators of learning, rather than presenters of information.

In addition to principles based on language theories and teaching approaches, teachers' personal philosophies and beliefs also serve as an important source of their thinking and decision-making (Bailey, 1996). Here is an example of a teacher describing some of the beliefs and principles she brings to her teaching:

> I think it's important to be positive as a personality. I think the teacher has to be a positive person. I think you have to show a tremendous amount of patience. And I think if you have a good attitude you can project this to the students and hopefully establish a relaxed atmosphere in your classroom so that the students won't dread to come to class but have a good class. I feel that it's important to have a lesson plan of some sort. Because you need to know what you want to teach and how you are going to go from the beginning to the end. And also taking into consideration the students, what there ability is, what their background is and so on. I have been in situations where I did not understand what was being taught or what was being said, and how frustrating it is and so when I approach it I say: how can I make it the easiest way for them to understand what they need to learn?

This teacher's philosophy emphasizes the teacher's attitude and the need to create a supportive environment for learning in the classroom. She stresses the need for lesson planning, but her justification for lesson planning is based on helping the students rather than helping the teacher. Other examples of teachers' principles include:

- Follow the learners' interest to maintain students' involvement.
- Always teach to the whole class – not just to the best students.

- Seek ways to encourage independent student learning.
- Make learning fun.
- Build take-away value in every lesson.
- Address learners' mental processing capacities.
- Facilitate learner responsibility or autonomy.

The next step in the process of materials development thus involves the participants reaching a consensus on the principles they will draw on in planning a course or set of materials. As background to this they will either have taken a related set of courses on methodology and second language learning or have read and discussed core readings relevant to the area they plan to focus on. The following is an example of the principles developed by a group of teachers for use in developing materials in a listening course:

Listening activities should involve goals relevant to authentic listening
Listening activities should provide for the development of listening skills
Listening activities should help develop listening strategies
Listening activities should teach rather tan test
Listening activities should develop top-down, bottom-up, and interactive
    listening
Listening texts should reflect learners out of class needs for listening
Listening tasks should reflect the nature of on-line listening
Listening should be taught both for comprehension and for language learning
Listening activities should be engaging and provide a success experience

Macro- and micro-levels of course organization

At this point I introduce the notion of macro- and micro-levels of course planning and syllabus design. A language course will generally need to include many different syllabus strands. A course which is built around multiple syllabus strands is said to be based on an integrated syllabus, which is the approach used in most general English adult and young-adult courses today. However, sometimes one syllabus strand will be used as the overall planning framework for the course, i.e. at the macro-level of organization, and others will be used as a minor strand of the course, i.e. at the micro-level. This is often the case with skills-based courses, such as courses in speaking or writing. For example, the table below shows different options for a writing course, with different syllabus units as the macro- and micro-level syllabus strands (Table 6.1).

   In order to identify the syllabus frameworks used in published course books, the participants examine units from different kinds of courses and describe the macro- and micro-levels of organization they contain.

Table 6.1   Macro- and micro-levels of course organization

	Macro-level	**Micro-level**
Option 1	Skills	Text types Grammar Composing processes
Option 2	Text types	Skills Topics Grammar
Option 3	Composing processes	Text types Grammar Vocabulary

Outcomes

The participants are now ready to plan a design template for a sample unit. This serves as a check-list or reference point which the writers can use in writing the materials. It can include specifications for:

- The length of units
- The organization of units
- The skills to be covered in each unit
- The exercise types that can be used
- The length of spoken and written texts (e.g. dialogues, reading texts)
- The vocabulary level of the materials
- The arrangement of exercises on each page
- The kinds of art and other design features that needed
- The headings to be used for exercises
- The kinds of instruction lines to be employed for exercises and their length

In developing their unit template I also provide guidelines in terms of a description of the features of a successful unit:

- *Length*: Sufficient, but not too much, material is included.
- *Development*: One activity leads effectively into the next; the unit does not consist of a random sequence of activities.
- *Coherence*: The unit has an overall sense of unity.
- *Pacing*: Each activity within the unit moves at a reasonable pace. For example, if there are five sections in the unit, one does not require five times as much time as the others to complete.
- *Challenge*: Activities are at a level that presents a reasonable challenge, but does not lead to frustration on the part of the learners.

- *Interest level*: The content of the unit is likely to arouse the learners' interest.
- *Outcome*: At the end of the unit, learners are able to demonstrate a set of learning outcomes.

The preceding activities are intended to prepare the participants for the materials writing process itself. Effective materials do many of the things a teacher would normally do as part of his or her teaching. These include:

- Arouse the learners' interest
- Remind them of earlier learning
- Tell them what they will be learning next
- Explain new learning content to them
- Set clear learning targets
- Provide them with strategies to use in learning
- Help them get feedback on their learning
- Provide practice opportunities
- Enable them to check their progress

But how do teachers develop the ability to do these things, and how can they be taught to apply these processes in developing classroom materials? One of the core abilities materials writers make use of is their pedagogical reasoning skills (Shulman, 1987). These are the specialized kind of thinking skills that enable teachers to do the following:

- To analyze potential lesson content (e.g. a piece of realia, as in the example above, a text, an advertisement, a poem, a photo etc) and identify ways in which it could be used as a teaching resource.
- To identify specific linguistic goals (e.g. in the area of speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing etc) that could be developed from the chosen content.
- To anticipate any problems that might occur and ways of resolving them.
- To make appropriate decisions about time, sequencing, and grouping arrangements.

Shulman (1987) described this ability as a process of transformation in which the teacher turns the subject matter of instruction into forms that are pedagogically powerful and that are appropriate to the level and ability of the students. Experienced teachers use these skills every day when they plan their lessons, when they decide how to adapt lessons form their coursebook, and when they search the internet and other sources for materials and content that they can use in their classes. It is one of the most fundamental dimensions of teaching, one that is acquired through experience, through accessing content knowledge, and through knowing what learners need to know and how to help

them acquire it. And it is a skill that is essential in preparing effective teaching materials. But can pedagogical reasoning skills be taught?

I believe that they can, and to do so I make use of a two-part strategy. The first component of the strategy involves a) modelling, b) guided and collaborative expert-novice practice, followed by c) participant-directed practice. The second component of the strategy involves backward design (Richards, 2013). Here is how this approach is implemented.

Backward design instead of forward design

Participants in my workshops typically assume that the best way to develop materials is to use a process I call "forward design" (Richards, 2103). Wiggins and McTighe (2006: 15) give an illustration of this process with an example of a typical forward design lesson plan:

- The teacher chooses a topic for a lesson (e.g. racial prejudice)
- The teacher selects a resource (e.g. *To Kill A Mockingbird*)
- The teacher chooses instructional methods based on the resource and the topic (e.g. a seminar to discuss the book and cooperative groups to analyze stereotypical images in films and on television)
- The teacher chooses essay questions to assess student understanding of the book

A similar example would be a teacher planning a unit around "narratives" in a writing class. The starting point would be an understanding of the nature of narratives and their linguistic and discourse features. Models of different kinds of narratives would then be studied as preparation for students writing their own narrative texts. Assessment tasks might involve reviewing and correcting poorly written narratives or writing further texts based on the features that had been taught and practised.

The difficulty with choosing forward design as a planning strategy is that it often results in loosely or poorly connected sequences of tasks that do not result in clear learning outcomes. Each activity in an activity sequence is often planned independently and there are often gaps in what learners need to know. An alternative approach is to start with a clear statement of intended learning outcomes and examples of the outputs that reflect these outcomes and to work backwards from these to determine what needs to be taught. This is known as backward design.

In practice this means taking the topic or theme for a unit and mapping out in precise details exactly what the learners should able to do at the end of the unit. For example, if the participants want to plan a set of materials to teach business presentation skills, I first ask them to demonstrate or provide examples of what they think an effective business presentation looks like. They should prepare and video-record one or more examples of what they would consider a good

business presentation, one that reflects the specific features of business presentations which they want their learners to master. Similarly, if they are developing materials to teach listening skills, they should start with choosing the kinds of listening texts they want their students to be able to understand and describe the kinds of listening skills the learners would need to use in order to understand the text. Once the participants have done this, they can then consider how many steps it will take to get their learners to this end point, and what they will need to learn along the way to provide them with the means to do so.

In my experience with participants on materials development courses, this is not the usual way in which they start. They typically brainstorm through the different activities that they think the unit could contain, without a very clear understanding of what the precise learning outcomes are.

Modelling, guided and collaborative expert-novice practice, followed by participant-directed practice

To demonstrate how backward design is used as a procedure in materials development, I often model the process using a think-aloud process. For demonstration purposes I take an example of topic for a unit of materials, and at the white board I develop a statement of learning outcomes and a sample outcome for the topic. I usually choose something that can be achieved within a class period of 50 minutes, such as "A functional lesson focussing on making invitations, accepting and declining invitations." I then talk through the whole process of working from the learning outcomes and moving backwards to map out what needs to be taught and how it could be taught in order to achieve them. This also involves identifying the different kinds of activities that will be used throughout the unit. Throughout the process I try to verbalize the thinking processes and decision-making I make use of in arriving at choices to do with language, skills, and tasks. Participants sometimes keep a record of this process, using their smart-phones or laptops.

Following my modelling of the thinking and decision-making processes that I make use of in developing materials using a backward design procedure, the participants take part in group planning activities in which they plan a unit on a topic of their choice or using a topic and a set of learning outcomes that I provide. Over the next few class periods, they discuss and develop learning outcomes for a unit of materials they would like to develop, describe the principles the materials aim to reflect, develop a unit template, choose activity types and exercises, discuss resources they may need to use such as video, the internet, and texts and draft sample activities. They may also prepare a first draft of a unit of materials, which they present to the class. During this process I serve as a consultant, giving specific feedback on the strengths and limitations of their materials.

These activities are designed to serve as preparation for an individual project which the participants go on to develop either individually or as a collaborative

project. This usually takes the form of a fully developed unit of materials or a detailed plan for a set of materials or a course they plan to develop when they return to their home countries. In both cases the participants produce a document that describes their teaching context, the teachers and learners who will use the materials, why the materials are needed, the rationale for the materials, and the process they used in developing them.

Implications

Those with little experience of materials design often underestimate the issues involved in good instructional design. This "minimalist" perspective on the demands of materials development is seen in the following comment (Kumaravadivelu, 2012: 21):

> A core course on materials production for pre-service teachers, and hands-on workshops for in-service teachers, can easily facilitate the development of the knowledge, skill, and disposition necessary for them to produce instructional materials.

Such a viewpoint trivializes the nature of instructional design. The account given above has attempted to provide a more realistic picture of the nature and complexity of the issues involved. While not all teachers may need or wish to develop their own instructional materials, most are regularly involved in selecting, evaluating, and sometimes modifying published materials for their own use. The workshop procedures aim to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills that can support these kinds of activities.

Participants complete an institutional evaluation form on completing the course and typically value the knowledge and skills they acquire, as well as the experiences they participated in, very positively.

> *This class is very rich with new insight and content. Many discussion and hands on help learning very much.*

> *One of the best I ever attended.*

> *The materials and lessons are at the right level. The lecturer's extensive experiences and knowledge are very helpful in the cause.*

> *The lecturer, the examples and the advice was really useful in providing a clear purpose.*

> *Useful for my teaching and work in my university*

> *We gain a lot of knowledge on designing curriculum and materials we can apply it usefully.*

The course is very effective for my teaching to make curriculum design.

This course is very useful in that I have great opportunity to design a course of my own.

This course is really needed for my country, state and institution. It is really practical.

Course participants' comments, July 2014

Conclusion

Teachers who take part in materials development workshops and courses generally commence a course with very little awareness of the kinds of knowledge and skills involved in developing classroom materials, and as observed above, often underestimate the nature of the skills involved. From my experience of teaching courses of this kind, teachers who prove most adept at materials development are proficient in English, have relevant practical classroom experience to draw on, have academic knowledge related to the area they wish to focus on, are familiar with a wide range of teaching techniques and strategies, enjoy collaborating with others and are receptive to constructive and at times, critical feedback, and look for original and creative solutions to issues that arise in materials preparation. Not all language teachers will go on to develop classroom materials due to limitations of time and resources as well as limitations in their language proficiency. For these teachers, a course in materials development is still useful, since it gives them a better understanding of what underlies the materials they teach from. Other teachers may go on to become key decision-makers and curriculum planners in their institutions or may already be engaged in different aspects of materials development. For both of these groups of teachers, comments such as those above suggest that learning the skills of materials development is a valuable component of their professional development.

References

Bailey, K.M. (1996). "The best laid plans: Teachers" in-class decisions to depart from their lesson plan. In K.M. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds), *Voices From the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 115–140.

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grellet, F. (1983). *Developing Reading Skills.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hudson, T. (2007). *Teaching Second Language Reading.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). Individual identity, cultural globalization, and teaching English as an international language: The case for an epistemic break. In L. Alsagoff, S.L. Mackay, G. Hu, & W.A. Renandya (eds), *Principles and Practices for Teaching English as an International Language.* New York: Routledge, 9–27.

Lantolf, J.P. (ed.) (2000). *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richards, Jack C. (2013). Curriculum strategies in language teaching: Forward, central and backward design. *RELC Journal 44*, 1, 1–33.

Shulman, L.S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 57, 1, 1–22.

Thornbury, S. (2005b) *How to Teach Speaking*. Harlow: Pearson Education/Longman.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2006). *Understanding by Design: A Framework for Effecting Curriculum Development and Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Recommended reading

Basturkmen, Helen (2010). *Designing courses in English for Specific Purposes*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book describes the key considerations involved in developing ESP courses and provides case studies of how teachers developed courses to meet the specific needs of their students.

Garton, Sue and Kathleen Graves (ed.) (2014). *International Perspectives on Materials in ELT*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book brings together different perspectives on ELT materials from a range of international contexts.

Gray, John (ed.) 2013. *Critical Perspectives in Language Teaching Materials*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This is a research-based exploration of how issues such as representation, identity, ideology and commercialism are represented in commercial ELT materials.

Harwood, Nigel (ed.) (2014). *English Language Teaching Textbooks: Content, Consumption, Production.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book contains chapters focusing on analysis of textbook content, how textbooks are used in the English language classroom, and textbook writers' accounts of the textbook writing and publication process.

McGrath, Ian. (2002). *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

This provides a useful and practical introduction to designing tasks and materials for language teaching.

Engagement priorities

1. Examine a unit from a published textbook series. What template or unit format is each unit in the book written to? What principles do you think were used in determining the sequence of activities in the unit?
2. What priorities do you think teachers usually have in mind when choosing a textbook? What priorities do you think learners have when they are assigned a textbook as the primary reference in a language course?
3. Examine a coursebook and try to determine the particular philosophy of teaching and learning which the materials reflect.
4. Compare two coursebooks for the same skill area (e.g. writing, listening, reading). What macro- and micro-levels of organization are the materials based on?