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Edited by Nigel Harwood

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Series editor's preface

A fact of life in the majority of language-learning classrooms around the world is that commercial or teacher-made materials generally provide the core resources that teachers and students depend on. Despite the opportunities provided by blended learning and other Web-based initiatives, traditional books or print-based learning materials continue to play an important role in the lives of the majority of teachers and learners.

The reasons for this are various. Although “authentic materials” are often recommended as an alternative to commercial materials, the scope of language teaching around the world today is such that few teaching institutions have the resources to abandon commercial materials. And Web-dependent learning is not always an option since, in many places, adequate resources for technology-based learning are not available. Learning contexts, too, are often situation specific, and when commercial materials do not provide a good fit with learners’ needs, teachers are often required either to adapt available materials or to design their own materials for a specific teaching–learning context. In addition, the majority of the world’s English language teachers are not native speakers of English and may have limited teacher training – for such teachers, well-designed materials can provide rich sources of learning input as well as facilitate teacher development.

In second language teacher-education programs, however, insufficient attention is often given to the role of materials in language teaching. Teachers sometimes graduate from such programs with limited experience in materials design, evaluation, adaptation, and implementation. The status of materials design is sometimes undervalued in graduate education, where it is regarded as a relatively trivial and theory-free activity. However, whereas materials design may seem an eminently practical activity, sound instructional materials cannot be created in a theoretical vacuum. They draw on a wide variety of theoretical foundations, since they reflect particular assumptions about the nature of language, of second language learning, and of second language teaching. They should hence be informed by research and current knowledge drawn from relevant domains of applied linguistics,

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including corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, genre analysis, pragmatics, and sociocultural theory.

Materials design is also a special case of the application of the sophisticated kind of thinking that expert teachers possess, which is sometimes called *pedagogical reasoning skills*. These are the special skills that enable language teachers to do the following:

- To analyze potential lesson content (i.e., a piece of realia, 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 (i.e., 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.
- To develop appropriate instructional tasks as the basis for the lesson.

Shulman¹ described these abilities 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 and competent teachers use these skills every day when they plan their lessons, when they decide how to adapt lessons from their course book, 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. This is also one of the core skills of an expert materials writer.

At the same time, materials design is also, to some extent, art rather than science. The ability to design materials that are pedagogically sound and yet also show evidence of the writers' creativity and imagination depends on considerable skill and ingenuity. The best instructional materials not only serve their pedagogic goals but also hopefully provide the basis for memorable and enjoyable classroom experiences for both teachers and students. The ingredients needed to achieve this level of engagement, however, are often difficult to quantify.

The present book, therefore, provides a timely overview of the current state of materials writing in language teaching, surveying both the theoretical and practical issues involved in the design, implementation, and

¹ Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 57(2): 4–14.

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evaluation of materials in language programs, as well as providing case studies of materials design projects in a wide variety of settings and contexts. Nigel Harwood has assembled a stimulating collection of original papers that describe different approaches to materials design, including teacher-developed classroom materials and commercial materials, as well as technology-driven materials. The contributors describe the theories and principles underlying their approaches to materials design, the issues that need to be resolved, problems that have been encountered, and the solutions that were arrived at. The papers in the book hence provide invaluable documentation of the processes and resources employed by materials writers and, as such, can serve as guidelines for both new and experienced teachers who are involved in materials design projects in their own institutions.

Jack C. Richards