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978-0-521-38794-1 - The Language Teaching Matrix  
Jack C. Richards  
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Contents

Preface      vii

1 Curriculum development in second language teaching      1

2 Beyond methods      35

3 Designing instructional materials for teaching listening comprehension      50

4 Conversationally speaking: approaches to the teaching of conversation      67

5 A profile of an effective reading teacher      87

6 From meaning into words: writing in a second or foreign language      100

7 The teacher as self-observer: self-monitoring in teacher development      118

8 Language and content: approaches to curriculum alignment      144  
*Jack C. Richards and Daniel Hurley*

Conclusion: a look toward the future      163

References      167

Index      177

## Preface

*The Language Teaching Matrix* is designed to serve as a textbook in courses on language teaching methodology and teacher preparation, and as a source book for courses on language curriculum design, materials development, and teaching practice. The “matrix” in the title is a metaphor for an interactive and multidimensional view of language teaching; for in this book effective language teaching is seen to result from interactions among the curriculum, teachers, students, methodology, and instructional materials. In particular, three factors are singled out as central to effective teaching: the curriculum, methodology, and instructional materials.

This is not a book of prescriptions, where teaching is approached in terms of *methods*, or *products* that offer teachers predetermined models to follow. Rather, teaching is approached as a dynamic *process*. Teaching depends upon the application of appropriate theory, the development of careful instructional designs and strategies, and the study of what actually happens in the classroom. Because these ingredients will change according to the teaching context, effective teaching is continually evolving throughout one’s teaching career. Discussion questions and tasks at the end of each chapter will aid teachers in their personal journeys toward effective teaching.

Each chapter in the book takes a central issue in language teaching and examines its position within the language teaching matrix – that is, its role and position within the network of factors that have to be considered. Chapter 1 presents an overview of curriculum development processes and suggests that an effective second language program depends upon careful information gathering, planning, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Chapter 2 contrasts two approaches to conceptualizing the nature of methodology in language teaching. One is the familiar methods-based approach to teaching. This is seen to be a “top-down” approach because it involves selecting a method, then making teachers and learners match the method. The other is a “bottom-up” approach; it involves exploring the nature of effective teaching and learning, and discovering the strategies used by successful teachers and learners in the classroom. This chapter hence seeks to draw attention away from methods and to address the more interesting question of how successful teachers and learners achieve their results.

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The next four chapters of the book focus on the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each skill is discussed from a different perspective.

Chapter 3 looks at a key issue in the teaching of listening comprehension: the design of suitable instructional materials. It is argued that teaching materials should recognize the difference between two kinds of listening processes, referred to as top-down and bottom-up processing. In addition, differences between interactional and transactional purposes for listening are discussed. These distinctions are then used as a framework for designing listening exercises.

In the next chapter, teaching conversation is approached through an examination of the nature of casual conversation and conversational fluency. Two approaches are compared – an indirect approach, which teaches conversation through the use of interactive tasks, and a direct approach, which focuses on the processes and strategies involved in casual conversational interaction. The need to monitor classroom activities to determine their effectiveness in promoting conversation skills is emphasized.

In Chapter 5 a case study is presented of an effective reading teacher. From interviews and video recordings of the teacher's class, an attempt is made to understand how the teacher approaches his teaching and the kinds of planning and decision making that the teacher employs. In Chapter 6 approaches to the teaching of writing are considered. The importance of an adequate theory of writing is stressed, and product- and process-based approaches to teaching writing are compared. Implications for the roles of learners, the teacher, and instructional activities are discussed.

Chapter 7 discusses ways in which teachers can explore the nature of their own classroom practices and improve the effectiveness of their teaching through self-monitoring. Three approaches to self-monitoring are elaborated: personal reflection through journal or diary accounts of teaching, self-reports based on focused reports of lessons, and audio or video recordings of lessons. Practical suggestions are given on what teachers can look for in their own lessons, procedures for carrying out self-monitoring, and how to use the information obtained.

In Chapter 8 approaches to developing programs for students of limited English proficiency are considered. Traditionally language proficiency has been the main focus of such programs. The goal has been to develop minority students' language skills to a level where they can cope with the demands of regular classroom instruction. It is suggested that this approach is inadequate, and that an effective program must address three crucial dimensions of classroom learning, referred to as the interactional dimension (the ability to understand and use the social rules of classroom discourse), the instructional task dimension (the ability to

## Preface

understand the nature of learning in mainstream classrooms), and the cognitive dimension (the ability to understand and assimilate concepts and information in different content areas).

The book concludes with a short chapter offering reflections on some of the key points of the book. The primary goal of *The Language Teaching Matrix* is to engage teachers and teachers-in-training, as well as teacher educators, in the investigation of classroom teaching and learning. In order to facilitate this and to assist instructors using the book, each chapter concludes with a set of discussion questions and practical activities. These serve to link the information in each chapter with practical issues in curriculum development, methodology, classroom observation, and materials design.

This book resulted from graduate courses I taught as a faculty member of the Department of English as a Second Language at the University of Hawaii, from 1981 to 1988. Discussions with students and colleagues helped clarify my understanding of many of the issues discussed here. For ongoing support, advice, and encouragement while the book was being written, I am particularly grateful to my former colleagues Richard Day, Richard Schmidt, and Martha Pennington. Others whose advice has always been both constructive and supportive include particularly Chris Candlin, Fred Genesee, David Nunan, and Tom Scovel. Lastly, special thanks are due to Ellen Shaw at Cambridge University Press, whose guidance and encouragement helped shape the book into a more readable and coherent form; to Barbara Curialle Gerr, who saw the book through production; and to Sandra Graham, whose skillful copy editing helped remove many a circumlocutious thought and infelicitous phrase – though not this one!