



The Language Teaching Matrix

JACK C.
RICHARDS

●
*Cambridge Language
Teaching Library*

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

This page intentionally left blank

The Language Teaching Matrix

CAMBRIDGE LANGUAGE TEACHING LIBRARY

A series covering central issues in language teaching and learning, by authors who have expert knowledge in their field.

In this series:

Affect in Language Learning *edited by Jane Arnold*

Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching *by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers*

Appropriate Methodology and Social Context *by Adrian Holliday*

Beyond Training *by Jack C. Richards*

Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers *by Anne Burns*

Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching *edited by David Nunan*

Communicative Language Teaching *by William Littlewood*

Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom *by David Nunan*

Developing Reading Skills *by Françoise Grellet*

Developments in English for Specific Purposes *by Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St. John*

Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers *by Michael McCarthy*

Discourse and Language Education *by Evelyn Hatch*

English for Academic Purposes *by R. R. Jordan*

English for Specific Purposes *by Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters*

Establishing Self-Access: From Theory to Practice *by David Gardner and Lindsay Miller*

Foreign and Second Language Learning *by William Littlewood*

Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective *edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming*

The Language Teaching Matrix *by Jack C. Richards*

Language Test Construction and Evaluation *by J. Charles Alderson, Caroline Clapham, and Dianne Wall*

Learner-centredness as Language Education *by Ian Tudor*

Managing Curricular Innovation *by Numa Markee*

Materials Development in Language Teaching *edited by Brian Tomlinson*

Psychology for Language Teachers *by Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden*

Research Methods in Language Learning *by David Nunan*

Second Language Teacher Education *edited by Jack C. Richards and David Nunan*

Society and the Language Classroom *edited by Hywel Coleman*

Teacher Learning in Language Teaching *edited by Donald Freeman and Jack C. Richards*

Teaching the Spoken Language *by Gillian Brown and George Yule*

Understanding Research in Second Language Learning *by James Dean Brown*

Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy *edited by Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy*

Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education *by Evelyn Hatch and Cheryl Brown*

Voices From the Language Classroom *edited by Kathleen M. Bailey and David Nunan*

The Language Teaching Matrix

Jack C. Richards

University of Auckland



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521384087

© Cambridge University Press 1990

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provision of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published in print format 1990

ISBN-13 978-0-511-47395-1 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-38408-7 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of urls for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

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 <i>Jack C. Richards and Daniel Hurley</i>	144
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.

Preface

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

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!

The Language Teaching Matrix

1 Curriculum development in second language teaching

Second language teaching is often viewed from a very narrow perspective – that of the teaching act. Consequently much of the literature on second language teaching deals with teaching methods or with the design and use of instructional materials. If students aren't learning it is assumed to be the fault of the method, the materials, or the teacher. Yet the success of a language program involves far more than the mere act of teaching. As with any successful educational program, a number of levels of planning, development, and implementation are involved. Goals and objectives for the program have to be developed as well as syllabuses and instructional materials. Instructional strategies have to be determined, teachers selected and trained, and tests and assessment procedures chosen. Once the program is in operation, procedures are needed to enable the program to be monitored and its effects on learners and learning evaluated. In order to plan for effective second language teaching, a comprehensive view is needed of the nature and process of language program development. Providing such a view is the goal of this chapter, in which issues and practices in language curriculum development are reviewed and their contribution to effective language teaching assessed.

Language curriculum development, like other areas of curriculum activity, is concerned with principles and procedures for the planning, delivery, management, and assessment of teaching and learning. Curriculum development processes in language teaching comprise needs analysis, goal setting, syllabus design, methodology, and testing and evaluation.

Needs analysis

Needs assessment refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating needs, and establishing priorities among them. (Pratt 1980:79)

In language curriculum development, needs analysis serves the purposes of:

1. providing a mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input into the content, design, and implementation of a language program through

The language teaching matrix

- involving such people as learners, teachers, administrators, and employers in the planning process
2. identifying general or specific language needs that can be addressed in developing goals, objectives, and content for a language program
 3. providing data that can serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating an existing program.

In language teaching, the impact of needs analysis has been greatest in the area of special-purposes program design, and a considerable literature now exists on the role of needs assessment in English for specific purposes (ESP) (Robinson 1980). But needs analysis is also fundamental to the planning of general language courses.

Parameters, sources, and procedures

Needs analysis may focus on either the general parameters of a language program or on the specific communicative needs of language learners. The first approach may be referred to as *situation analysis*, and involves focusing on the following kinds of questions:

- Who are the learners?
- What are the learners' goals and expectations?
- What learning styles do the learners prefer?
- How proficient are the teachers in the target language?
- Who are the teachers?
- What training and experience do the teachers have?
- What teaching approach do they favor?
- What do teachers expect of the program?
- What is the administrative context of the program?
- What constraints (e.g., time, budget, resources) are present?
- What kinds of tests and assessment measures are needed?

The second approach, *communicative needs analysis* (Munby 1978), is concerned with gathering information about the learners' communicative needs in the target language, and involves questions such as these:

- In what settings will the learners use the target language?
- What role relationships are involved?
- Which language modalities are involved (e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking)?
- What types of communicative events and speech acts are involved?
- What level of proficiency is required?

Answers to these questions help determine the type of language skills and level of language proficiency the program should aim to deliver. An example of a questionnaire in the domain of situation analysis is given

in Appendix 1, and one in the domain of communicative needs analysis in Appendix 2.

Determining needs is not an exact science, however, since it involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches, requires the use of a variety of formal and informal data-gathering procedures, and seeks to identify or quantify needs that may be by nature imprecise. Needs statements thus represent judgments by the needs analyst as to what should be analyzed, the means to be used, and the meaning and significance of the data collected. Methods employed in gathering data vary according to setting and may involve participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, content analysis of job descriptions and job advertisements, tests, role play, and analysis of communication breakdowns (Roberts 1980; Schroder 1981).

Needs-analysis procedures generate a considerable amount of data, including information about the context of the language program, the learners, the teachers, and the administrative factors that affect the program. This information is then used in planning the program itself. Let us examine some of the key processes involved in more detail.

Goals and objectives

Curriculum goals are general statements of the intended outcomes of a language program, and represent what the curriculum planners believe to be desirable and attainable program aims based on the constraints revealed in the needs analysis. Goals can be used as a basis for developing more specific descriptions of the intended outcomes of the program (the program objectives). Goal statements refer to elements of the program that are actually going to be addressed by instruction. For example, a needs analysis might reveal that a group of learners had unfavorable attitudes toward the proposed language program. A goal statement reflecting this might be:

Students will develop favorable attitudes toward the program.

However, while this goal might represent a sincere wish on the part of teachers, it should appear as a program goal only if it is to be addressed concretely in the program.

From goals to objectives

In language teaching, a number of different ways of stating program objectives are commonly employed, including behavioral, skills-based, content-based, and proficiency-based objectives.

The language teaching matrix

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

The most familiar way to state objectives is in terms of behavior. Mager (1962) specified three essential characteristics of behavioral objectives:

1. They must unambiguously describe the behavior to be performed;
2. They must describe the conditions under which the performance will be expected to occur;
3. They must state a standard of acceptable performance (the criterion).

Findlay and Nathan (1980) give examples of behavioral objectives in “competency-based” language programs. Sample objectives for a survival language course include:

Given an oral request, the learner will say his/her name, address and telephone number to a native speaker of English and spell his/her name, street and city so that an interviewer may write down the data with 100% accuracy.

Given oral directions for a 4-step physical action, the learner will follow the directions with 100% accuracy.

Sample objectives for an ESP course for clerical workers are:

Given a letter with 10 proofreading marks for changes, the learner will re-write the letter with 90% accuracy in 10 minutes.

Given the first and last names of 10 persons, five with Spanish surnames and five with English surnames from a local telephone directory, the learner will locate the names and write down the telephone numbers in 5 minutes with 90% accuracy. (Findlay and Nathan 1980: 226)

Four justifications are commonly made to support the use of behavioral objectives in curriculum planning:

1. They help teachers to clarify their goals.
2. They facilitate instruction by highlighting the skills and subskills underlying different instructional content.
3. They make the evaluation process easier.
4. They provide a form of accountability.

A criticism that is often made, however, is that representing language teaching goals in terms of behavioral objectives is impractical, as well as undesirable. Some learning goals cannot readily be stated in terms of behavioral changes expected in students. In such cases, it is preferable to focus on the classroom tasks and learning activities that learners should engage in, and the intrinsic worth and value of these experiences for their own sake, without specifying precise learning outcomes. This is sometimes referred to as a process-based approach (Stenhouse 1975).

Behavioral objectives also tend to deal only with aspects of second language proficiency that can be represented as “competencies” and hence tend to trivialize the nature of second language acquisition.

SKILLS-BASED OBJECTIVES

A common way of stating objectives in language programs is to specify “microskills,” or processes that account for fluency in such specific “macroskill” areas as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In specifying microskills, the curriculum planner tries to describe the competencies that account for functional ability in a given skill but are “independent of specific settings or situations” (Krahnke 1987: 49). For example, Nuttall (1983: 146) presents objectives for an intensive reading program in the following form:

After completing the reading course, the student will:

- a) Use skimming when appropriate to ensure that he reads only what is relevant, to help subsequent comprehension.
- b) Make use of non-text information (especially diagrams etc.) to supplement the text and increase understanding.
- c) Read in different ways according to his purpose and the type of text.
- d) Not worry if he does not understand every word, except when complete accuracy is important.
- e) Recognize that a good writer chooses his words carefully and would have meant something different if he had chosen A rather than B. (An advanced reader will be able to explain the difference.)
- f) Make use of the reference system, discourse markers, etc., to help himself unravel the meaning of difficult passages.
- g) Be aware that a sentence with the same signification may have a different value in different contexts, and be able to identify the value.
- h) Be able to make use of the rhetorical organization of the text help him interpret a complex message.
- i) Be aware that a writer does not express everything he means, and be able to make inferences as required.
- j) Be aware that his own expectations influence his interpretation and recognize those occasions when the writer’s assumptions differ from his own.
- k) Be aware, when necessary, that he has not understood the text, and be able to locate the source of misunderstanding and tackle it.
- l) Respond fully to the text in whatever way is appropriate.

Richards (1985a: 199) lists among the microskills needed for academic listening the ability to

1. identify the purpose and scope of a lecture
2. identify and follow the topic of a lecture

The language teaching matrix

3. identify relationships among units within discourse (e.g., major ideas, generalizations, hypotheses, supporting ideas, examples)
4. identify the role of discourse markers in signaling the structure of a lecture
5. infer relationships (e.g., cause, effect, conclusion)
6. recognize key lexical items related to a topic
7. deduce meanings of words from context.

Krahnke (1987) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of a skills-based approach. Relevance to students' needs is a key advantage, whereas the potential ambiguity and subjectivity of skills taxonomies are disadvantages.

CONTENT-BASED OBJECTIVES

Many language programs specify objectives in relation to content. For example, the Council of Europe's Threshold Level English (Van Ek and Alexander 1980: 29) includes objectives related to fourteen topic areas. Under the topic "House and Home," for example, the following are among the specifications given:

Learners should be able to discuss where and under what conditions they live, specifically:

types of accommodation	describe the type of house, flat etc in which they live themselves, as well as those in the neighborhood, and seek similar information from others
accommodation, rooms	describe their own accommodation, house, flat, etc and the rooms in it, and seek similar information from others
furniture, bedclothes	mention and inquire about the availability of the most essential pieces of furniture and bedclothes
rent	state, rent and/or purchase price of their own accommodation and inquire about that of other houses, flats, etc

Lists of functions, often related to specific situations or settings, are also employed as objectives in language programs. For example, a syllabus guide for vocational English in industry lists "core needs" in the following form (MacPherson and Smith 1979):

To ask:

 someone to lend you something

 someone to pass something that's out of reach

To ask for:

 change in deductions

 change in holiday dates