

An Informed and Reflective Approach to Language Teaching and Material Design

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Esperanza Vera Rodríguez
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learning
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UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA
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Educadora de educadores

An Informed and Reflective Approach to
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Introduction

Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself
is enlightenment. Mastering others is strength.
Mastering yourself is true power.

—Lao Tzu (n. d.)

This book aims at scaffolding language teachers, pre-service language teachers, and undergraduate students in the process of teaching and material design by helping them to become informed decision-makers in this endeavour. It also aims at leading foreign language teachers to reflect critically on some key concerns in our field as well as on their own beliefs and to act consistently with that critical reflection to introduce, little by little, changes in our daily practices that can ultimately transform our students' thinking.

In chapter one, we will discuss relevant elements related to curriculum, namely its origins, the views on curriculum, and its application in the field of language teaching, with the view of broadening our framework of reference for our teaching practices and realising that crucial changes need to be done in our classrooms.

In chapter two, we will examine the principles that have guided some educational philosophies and how they have inspired the historical changes in curriculum design. We will take a careful look at the different and evolving views on curriculum design to become aware of significant transformations in the comprehension of schooling and the contexts that surround it and the motives that have guided those transformations. You will be encouraged to reflect upon your own philosophy and how it colours all the decisions you make regarding learning and teaching.

In chapter three, we will deal with the issue of how our system of beliefs is formed, the kind of mental models teachers generally hold about their teaching, and how a reflective process can help us make that system of beliefs explicit and even transform it in the light of a critical framework to articulate those beliefs. Sound theories in relation to the nature of language, language context, learning, language learning, and the learner and language teaching can illuminate our practices, but the main factor determining the articulation of those beliefs is above all the meaningful and coherent incorporation of those theories into our praxis.

In chapter four, we will expand our knowledge on some widely known psychological theories of learning, recalling their principles and contributions with the goal of examining how they have influenced language teaching methods and approaches throughout time. By summarizing the ideas proposed by recognised educational psychologists, we hope to promote a thorough analysis of your ideas about learning processes and to help you recollect the complexities of these processes and the several possibilities we now have to address the ins and outs associated to them.

In chapter five, we will draw on some principles for material design that can broaden your set of beliefs regarding teaching and learning. We will analyse the principles related to language learning based on second language research, as well as the importance of semiotics in our understanding of the signs that we daily encounter and some social conventions designers need to bear in mind when creating semiotic systems. Through illustrated examples, we will also present the elements we normally use in graphic design and the principles we should consider both when working with those elements to convey meanings and when analysing the meanings and messages that are embedded in the images we find in different types of texts, media, and social networks.

In chapter six, we will present an overview of the influence of the development of computers, computer science, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on education and on language teaching and some present developments that this field may undergo in the near future. We will analyse how the use we make of these technologies is led either by the extent of knowledge of technological developments we have, or by the system of beliefs we have built, or both.

In the last chapter, we will revise some models of language curriculum and analyse how those different models, together with national policies, certainly influence the way we address the matter of material design. This analysis would serve us as a framework to historically and conceptually situate the curricular strategy of designing our own materials, showing the possibilities we may have even if framed in extremely linguistically laden models. With this in mind, in chapter seven, we will explain in detail the main phases we propose for a model unit design, which can in turn function as a model for the construction of other teaching materials, for in this model unit we have made explicit and examined the system of beliefs that guides or will guide our curricular choices from now on.

In each one of the seven chapters, this book includes three key features designed to provide a framework upon which to reflect, apply, and further explore the chapter content.

These features are:

- **Time for Reflection**
This text feature emphasises the distinctive reflective approach of the book by inviting the readers to question and think about their own teaching and learning practices.
- **Time for Praxis**
It provides real opportunities for readers to apply the chapter contents and act upon their real practices so that further reflection and action are fostered.
- **Time for Exploration**
This text feature offers readers a selection of research-based readings to further explore the chapter contents. Most of these research-based readings are found in open access national and international journals that display our local, regional, and national concerns related to language teaching and learning processes.

We invite you to enjoy this book and the activities proposed, so that you may become more informed and reflective about your daily teaching practice and apply the new knowledge to your teaching and research in a critical way.

This would be the first of many steps we can give to gradually transform our classrooms, not only to make them more communicative, but also, and above all, to educate students who can use the foreign language with long-lasting

transformative purposes, not only using it as an instrument for the communication of meanings and establishment of social relationships, but also to understand other cultures, value their own, read the world critically and transform it. It is our responsibility, now more than ever, to raise our students' awareness of the power of knowledge and language to transform our worlds.

This book provides an extensive and accessible exploration of key features related to language teaching and material design. Framed within an informed and reflective approach, it offers a thorough discussion about the origins, educational philosophies, and evolving views of curriculum design. It then examines the key theories on language learning and teaching that build up our systems of beliefs and the way they articulate and shape our teaching practices. Drawing on key principles for material design, this book also invites the reader to analyze the meanings and messages that are embedded in the images we find in different types of texts, media, and social networks. A whole section is devoted to the influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on education and language teaching and the way they may also play a key role in our daily practices. This book closes with an integrative chapter that explains in detail the main phases we propose for a model unit design, which can in turn serve as a model for the construction of other teaching materials, for in this model unit we have made explicit the importance of articulating a sound system of beliefs to guide our curricular choices.

Along with the theoretical discussions present in the book, the reader will also find three key features designed to provide a framework upon which to reflect, apply, and further explore each chapter's content. A set of activities provide real opportunities to question, explore, and act upon classroom practice with transformative purposes.

This book is an important contribution to the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Colombia, as it aims to scaffold language teachers, pre-service language teachers, and undergraduate students in the process of teaching and material design by helping them to become informed decision-makers in this endeavor.

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