

Book Review: Language Curriculum Design and Socialisation

Peter Franck Mickan. *Multilingual Matters*, Bristol (2013). xvi + 133 pp. ISBN: 9781847698292

Aiyoub Jodairi Pineh¹

¹ Assistant Professor, University of Zanjan, Iran

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This book introduces a new trend in curriculum design and it is based on a novel concept of ‘text’, which is adopted from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL defines ‘text’ as ‘naturally occurring language use with social functions’ (Hasan, 2014, p.7). Although text occurs in space and time, it is not in the boundary of spatio-temporal dimensions per se. Its importance lies in its function for social practices, where language and action intertwine with each other to accomplish a specific type of social activity (Hasan, 2014). Besides, text is the initial stage in linguistic system, where different forms of language realises (Halliday, 1991; Hasan, 2014). Peter deploys this concept in proposing a curriculum design which is also in close affinity with the notion of genre in North American composition studies, New Rhetoric (NR). The NR holds that the emergence of genre is the result of repeated social actions in particular situations which in turn ends in specific form and content (Bazerman, 1988, Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984). Freedman and Medway (1994) support that NR genre theorists aim to unite linguistic similarities to the domain of human activities which take place regularly. Paltridge (2001) also states that genre studies in the NR put emphasis on the relationship between text, context, and the actions that genres fulfil within particular contexts. My understanding is that such a notion of genre is compatible with SFL notion of text for social practices, whereby the discourse types are intertwined to a wider socio-cultural understanding of language in use.

At the preface of the book the author reveals the theories which support the book. He points out that ‘the type of curriculum advocated in this book is constructed around the discourses or texts of social practices’ (p. xi). This implies that learning happens via active participation of the learners, and similar to NR the emphasis in this book is on a type of curriculum which deploys texts for fulfilling social actions rather than focusing on formal features of texts. In the reminder of his introduction, Mickan argues that there are ‘practical reasons for proposing a new curriculum model’ (p. xiii). For example, he refers to the demands and challenges in language planning programmes and national policies, including challenges faced in non-English speaking countries for extending the domain of English language teaching and learning from adult to teenage and nursery schools. This book, therefore, aims to introduce SFL based curricula development as a practical tool for facing the current challenges in today’s language education.

The book is consisted of 9 chapters. Chapter 1, ‘Texts in the Fabric of Life’, illustrates how texts, spoken and written, are systematically intertwined with our actions in everyday routine. The author has indicated this concept through authentic examples such as ‘leaving a telephone message’, ‘transcription of service encounter’, and ‘a help requesting’ in the Australian context. Peter has shown the systemic relationship between social practices and meaning-making on the one hand and their realisations in texts as ‘cultural artifacts’ on the other. In this sense, texts can facilitate meaning-making and lead to particular social practices without alienating human agents from their intimate cultural background. Therefore, teaching with texts both contextualises culture and embeds social actions and as Peter argues ‘this alignment between language and action results in expectation and the prediction in language pattern appropriate to particular occasions’ (p. 12).

Chapter 2, ‘Change and Renewal in Curriculum Design’, briefly surveys the history of curriculum and syllabus design from grammar-translation method to the current text-based curriculum development. After this survey, the author challenges inherited dichotomies in curriculum design such as language and culture, form and function, skills and strategies and classroom language and authentic language. My understanding of this chapter is that Peter has

successfully illustrated this drawback against the backdrop of current methodologies in curriculum design and has shown the gap for introducing a sound practical solution to the current challenges in language planning and curriculum design. Therefore, from this perspective the chapter shows that curriculum renewal should not be simply the reappraisal of previous models reluctant in giving up previous theoretical conceptions of language, but a forward looking with significant theoretical as well as methodological contributions.

Chapter 3, 'Learning the Language of Social Practices' introduces some important criteria in socially-oriented systematic language learning. The author elaborates on socialisation, community membership, social practices and social interaction as interrelated stages. Mickan elaborates on them and argues that such practices and texts are deployable in classrooms. For example, he argues that both second language and foreign language learning involves the process of socialisation. Following this, he emphasises on the importance of community membership, where people are distinguished by practices and ways of making meaning together. Peter maintains that a curriculum constructed with texts of social practices is a practical way for working with language as social semiotic and making interaction. He shows this through an authentic apologetic email of a student for late submission of an assignment. In the remainder of this chapter, Peter suggests a systemic methodology of 'modelling text', 'joint construction' and 'problem solving through mediated activities in another language'. My impression from this chapter is that a combination of learners' social practices texts and the introduced methodology could pave the ground for negotiation between learners' familiar and unfamiliar social practices texts or genres.

Chapter 4, 'Curriculum Design' elaborates on components of a curriculum design: syllabus, resources, work plan, social practices and assessments. In this section of the book, the author emphasises on the impact of each of these components in shaping learners' experiences of social practices and texts. In turn, it has been argued that they are systematically interconnected with language practices and probable genres as well. Therefore, the author proposes a model of teaching which starts systematically from experiencing texts in a clockwise method to analysing wording of texts, formulating meanings through composing texts and observing texts in use.

Chapter 5, 'Curriculum Planning', lists seven steps as pre-requisite criteria for a socially-oriented systemic language planning: identification of target group, description of aims and objectives, determination of learners' prior experiences, identification of social practices and semiotic resources, modelling discourse of social practices, analysis of textual features for raising awareness, and assisting learners in composing and conversing. The identified steps put a particular emphasis on students' prior and world knowledge on the one hand and to discourse resources as tools for participating in community of practices on the other. It is through the identification of these resources that teachers can develop curriculums based on their own and their students' needs and interests. However, some of the concepts in this chapter are likely not to be comprehensible for novice teachers.

Chapter 6, 'Teaching Practices' is the discussion of enacting on theoretical conceptions held in text-based language teaching. Peter states that the process of language learning should create an opportunity for socialising in another language. To this end, he offers seven characteristics such as community, membership, socialisation, apprenticeship, analysis, participation and transformation as pre-requisite for socially-oriented language pedagogy. Apart from this, he suggests eight proposals for deploying meaning-centred language pedagogies such as the integration of practices and texts, students' knowledge of practices and texts, students' experiences of speech events and literate practices, selection and preparation of practices and texts, macro and micro features for text construction, conversing and composing and assessment of participants in social practices. Though these proposals are explicitly stated, most of them require a journey of apprenticeship for application. My understanding is that some of these proposals might not be comprehensible for non-expert readers.

Chapter 7, 'Curriculum Applications' portrays the application of social theory to curricula design in different contexts such as content-based language teaching for ESL students or in language revival programmes such as Australian aboriginal languages. The chapter shows the flexibility of SFL theory for developing curricula in different areas of inquires. Chapter 8, 'Curriculum Design in Higher Education' extends the domain of curriculum applications to higher education, where academic literacies, quality teaching and disciplinary knowledge receive highest importance.

Chapter 9 briefly reviews some fundamental concepts such as the role of teachers and researchers as well as concepts such as language planning and curriculum renewal. The point highlighted in the concluding chapter once again retracts the attention to the functionality of texts through social practices.

Apart from some limitations, this reader friendly book adds an invaluable volume to curriculum design and introduces a new approach in curriculum renewal. Teachers as well as researchers can use it as a resource book. It provides both theoretical justifications and methodological solutions in the context of language teaching and learning. In a sense, the stance taken in this book is compatible with Widdowson (1984, p. 6) argument that, 'effective practice depends on theory, but that the theory has to be relevant to the purposes of practice and has to yield principles which can be interpreted and tested as practical teaching techniques'. The centrality of text as the realisation of social practices systematically integrates such factors as programme content, programme context, learners' needs and teaching aims and objectives. Therefore, the book replaces inadequacies of current methodologies detailed in chapter two by introducing a systemic model which has its root in the social theory. Therefore, socio-linguistically informed curriculum design can be the source of reappraisal in the current language pedagogy. The book has also implications for material writers, policy makers, teachers and teacher educators worldwide.

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