

### Review: *Language Curriculum Design and Socialisation*

Author: Peter Mickan  
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At the recent Australian National Conference for Teachers of German, held in Adelaide in July 2014, Dr Peter Mickan – Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Adelaide – presented a somewhat controversial workshop entitled ‘Text-based teaching and making sense in German: Taking a look at textbooks, teaching and texts’. During the workshop, Dr Mickan discussed how texts are social semiotic tools, by which students make meaning (see Mickan 2013; Mickan, Petrescu, & Timoney, 2006; Halliday 1975; Halliday 1978) and argued that many of the German textbooks used in Australian high schools and universities today contain nonsense exercises that separate language from meaning, thereby reducing students’ abilities to make connections and develop communicative ability in the language (see Wilkins 1976; Widdowson 1978).

The evocative language used by Dr Mickan, as well as his call for German teachers to overhaul their curriculum and to move away from functional-notional and communicative language teaching methodologies found in many current textbooks, are echoed in his book *Language Curriculum Design and Socialisation*. Mickan’s aim is to provide educators, curriculum planners and pre-service teachers with background knowledge in a range of curriculum models, an understanding of the role that social theory can play in language learning, as well as the know-how to plan, design and implement an effective text-based curriculum. Hence, Mickan is endeavouring to help “teachers be more cognizant of the needs of their students and tailor classes to those needs” (Sigler 2012, p.873).

Used as the core text for the postgraduate subject ‘Language, Learning and Linguistics’ at The University of Adelaide, this book has nine chapters, with each chapter offering “tasks” for the reader to complete, in order to further synthesise the ideas presented, as well as a list of additional readings, should teachers wish to know more about a particular topic. The book begins with a chapter on “Texts in the Fabric of Life”, which clearly introduces Mickan’s main argument; that we interact and use a multitude of different texts every day, making specific linguistic and structural choices in order to convey our meaning, and it is this intertwining of language and cultural purpose that makes authentic texts an excellent means by which to teach a language (Mickan 2013, pp. 3-4).

Chapters Two and Three then go on to explore how curriculum design has evolved over the past 50 years and why a social theory of language learning should be employed in the classroom. It is this in-depth consideration of the theoretical perspectives, units of analysis and the main activities undertaken by students under varying curriculum models that most resonated with me. This vital

area of educational theory was sorely missing from or at best under-represented in my pre-service languages methodology course and I believe its inclusion would have led to greater outcomes for my students from the very beginning of my teaching career.

The next four chapters, “Curriculum Design”, “Curriculum Planning”, “Teaching Practices” and “Curriculum Applications”, provide step-by-step guides on how to design and implement a text-based curriculum, including examples from primary and secondary foreign language classrooms, and German as a foreign language in particular. Whilst these chapters are highly informative and include an example of curriculum mapping (Mickan 2013, pp. 96-97) and an assessment proforma for one task (ibid., p. 98), a greater emphasis on assessment and a larger number of examples would have strengthened the value of this text as a tool for practising teachers.

Chapter Eight discusses curriculum design at the tertiary level and in particular how to approach the development of new courses. It is Chapter Nine, however, that leaves the reader with a good sense of where to head to next: the teacher as researcher. Mickan argues (ibid., p.125) that it is relevant and vital to teachers as professionals that they consider undertaking small-scale investigations within their own classes into the viability of a text-based curriculum. By undertaking qualitative research, teachers can gain a greater insight into how their students learn best, gather a range of valuable and informative data, and make an informed decision as to the role that this method could play in their classroom.<sup>1</sup> After all, it is the teacher who works with those particular students on a regular basis that has the most comprehensive grasp of what will work best for them.

Indeed, whilst there have been a substantial number of studies done on the effect of extensive reading and text-based or genre-based teaching methodology in an English as a Second Language environment (eg. Kim 2006; Mason & Krashen 1997; Meera & Remya 2010; Motteram 2006; Takase April 2007), there have been few published studies undertaken in a German as a foreign language context (eg. Rankin 2005; Wood 2011). Likewise, few studies have examined the effects of these on high school students, which Takase (April 2007) noted in her investigation on the impact of extensive English reading in a Japanese high school.

There also seems to be little evidence of available research undertaken in Australian high schools, although the work of Anne Burns (2000; 2012) and Jen Tindale (2003) has done much to inform and provide advice on best practice for Australian teachers, particularly in the area of text-based teaching and extensive reading. In the professional development text *Teaching Reading* (Tindale 2003) for example, Tindale presents a combination of ideas for integrating extensive reading into the curriculum, with example strategies and methods for teachers to use immediately in the classroom, alongside citing a range of important academic literature supporting text-based and genre-based teaching (see Feez 1998; Paltridge 2001; Eskey 1986; Callaghan 1993; Nation 2001; Schmitt & Carter 2000; Grabe 1995; Carrell 1998; Butt et al 2000).

As with many textbooks, *Language Curriculum Design and Socialisation* is comprised of sections

<sup>1</sup> I am currently undertaking such a study as part of my postgraduate studies, entitled *Classroom as community? An investigation into the effect of a text based/genre based approach in a high school German as Foreign Language classroom*. Please contact me for more information and/or if you would like a copy of the resulting paper.

that would be beneficial as stand-alone components for a range of practitioners. For example, Chapter 4 on “Curriculum Design” would be very helpful for a pre-service teacher but would be unnecessary for a seasoned teacher to consult. Certainly, Sigler’s (2013, p.875) comment that this book should be read alongside a range of others in preparation for becoming a teacher or designing a new curriculum rings true. However, the depth and style of the curriculum design model analysis, the breadth of examples given of text-based approaches being implemented in the classroom, and the professional reflection that this book enables the reader to undertake, makes this text a very worthwhile read for any language teacher.

#### Who is this book recommended for?

- Pre-service language teachers, currently undertaking studies in Education;
- Language Methodology tutors and lecturers;
- Tutors and lecturers in a tertiary environment who are designing a new course in any discipline;
- Primary or secondary language teachers looking to supplement/reinvigorate their curriculum and/or their teaching style;
- Primary or secondary language teachers wanting to improve their professional practice.

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Melissa is currently undertaking postgraduate studies in eLearning (University of New England) and Applied Linguistics (University of Adelaide). She can be contacted via her school email for further information about this book, information about her current study on text-based teaching or running professional development sessions for your school or network: [melissa.bond580@schools.sa.edu.au](mailto:melissa.bond580@schools.sa.edu.au)

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The complete list of references as well as a list of further reading can be emailed on request. Please contact Melissa Bond: [melissa.bond580@schools.sa.edu.au](mailto:melissa.bond580@schools.sa.edu.au)

## An Exhibition in Bonegilla – Memories in my Luggage

**In 2015 the Australian-German Welfare Society celebrates the contribution of the German migrants and expatriates to the Australian Society with a Travelling Exhibition. The Exhibition Launch is on 19 December at the former Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre and in February at the Goethe-Institut Melbourne. After that we will be at different venues around Melbourne.**

What motivates people to pack their cases and bags – pack up their lives even, and move to a foreign country? Why do we leave behind all that is known to us – our home, our families and friends, to start anew . . . and what happens then?

How does the new country welcome us, how do we integrate and get used to a new set of rules, a different political and judicial system, a country where the cars drive on the “wrong” side of the road and where they speak a different language?

And what is our contribution to this “multicultural” society, how much of our culture and our traditions do we introduce to our host nation – and how does it all fit together and become our experience?

It started with a book: **Ein bisschen Heimat im Gepäck** (ihleo verlag, Husum, 2014) by Sabine Nielsen, telling the life stories of migrants who arrived here between 1935 and 1956 – refugees, displaced or persecuted people, adventurers and those who sought to start a new life. Even today, their stories resonate in the minds of those recently arrived – or they help those, who feel overwhelmed by a tide of refugees, asylum seekers and new migrants, to understand better. The book will be published in English at the end of November: **Memories in my Luggage** (ihleo verlag, Husum, 2014).

And now? The exhibition **Memories in my Luggage – German Migrants 1935 – 1956**.

The German photographer Eva Maria Rugel took the portraits of the migrants represented in the book. These portraits were so impressive, it seemed a shame to “hide” them between the pages of a book, and Sabine Nielsen and Eva Maria Rugel decided to work together with the designer, David Wong, and prepare an exhibition under the auspice of the AGWS and the sponsorship of Henkell Brothers Australia. The exhibition will show photographs and texts, a digital presentation, information about organisations that assist migrants and memorabilia, which highlight the experience of migration. Together with the exhibitions, we offer a series of talks, lectures, forums, musical and culinary events.

**A Project of the Australian-German Welfare Society  
Sponsored by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Henkell Brothers**

Exhibition Dates and Venues:	
<b>Bonegilla Migrant Experience, Official Launch</b>	<b>19 Dec 2014 to 25 Jan 2015</b>
Goethe- Institut Melbourne, Melbourne Launch	6 to 25 Feb 2015
Brighton Library	5 to 26 Mar 2015
Glen Waverley Library	Apr 2015
Chapel on Station, Box Hill	11 to 24 Jun 2015
Tabulam and Templer Homes, Bayswater	Jul 2015
Westvale Community Centre, St Albans	Aug 2015
Diversitat, Geelong	Sep 2015
German Club Tivoli	Oct 2015



**Sabine Nielsen**  
Victoria