

## Book Review

# *Open Architecture Curricular Design in World Language Education*, by A. R. Corin, B. L. Leaver, & C. Campbell (Eds), 2025

Georgetown University Press, 244 pp.

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*Open Architecture Curricular Design in World Language Education* addresses a persistent challenge in language education: how to structure educational experiences that are at a student's level(s) and tailored to their needs. Textbooks offer many benefits, particularly in terms of quality control of content, organization, and efficiencies for busy teachers. Yet they also pose considerable challenges—they can include lockstep and seemingly soulless activities, dampening student (and teacher) motivation and creativity, while simultaneously offering overly general information or mindless worksheets that fail to meet the needs of students. Open Architecture Curricular Design (OACD) was thus developed, first institutionalized at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in 2015 for use with high-beginner language students and above. Now, 10 years after the adoption of OACD, this book brings together the experiences of teachers and administrators who used this approach. This edited volume aims to “introduce OACD to a broad readership of language learning professionals and interested language learners,” to encourage professionals and learners alike to experiment with OACD as both teachers and students come to view “near-native proficiency in a non-native language as a realistic goal over a course of study” (Corin et al., p. ix). A summary of the book and areas of strength and opportunities, as well as applicability for teaching at DLIFLC, follows.

## SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

### Part 1: The OACD Framework

*Open Architecture Curricular Design in World Language Education* is divided into five parts with 16 chapters. Part 1, Chapter 1 (Corin, Leaver, & Campbell), provides an overview of the approach, including its definition, the need for OACD, common principles, and its range of applicability and generalizability. Corin et al. define OACD as “a curricular design framework in which instruction proceeds independently of a textbook, either eschewing it entirely or relegating it to a supporting

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role” (p. 3). With OACD, language-learning topics are organized around a theme-based syllabus, placing authentic texts and tasks into modules that can move around freely as needed. This approach is learner-centered, even allowing “on the spot” (p. 4) changes as deemed necessary by the instructor. The authors concluded the chapter, noting that more research into OACD is needed.

## **Part 2: OACD in US Government Language Institutes: Programs at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center**

Chapter 2 opens this section, which features examples from DLIFLC. Lee’s chapter, “OACD as an Enabler for Transformative Learning in a Korean Course,” seeks to demonstrate how OACD can be utilized for language learning, bicultural competence, and learner autonomy. OACD approaches were interwoven with flipped learning, learning by teaching, and daily reflective learning journals. Examples highlight students’ changes in perspectives about the target language and culture and about themselves, rather than language development, however.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore how to use OACD with beginners. Chapter 3, “Preparing Novice Learners for Open Architecture Learning: The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model” (Krasner), outlines how this model can be used to teach the sound representations of Cyrillic letters to Russian students, noting that even at this level, “the majority of OACD features are oriented toward meaning versus form and feedback is given to learners holistically, keeping real-life communicative goals in mind” (p. 50). Chapter 4, Part 2, “OACD-Based Immersion Events Outside the Classroom in an Intensive Chinese Mandarin Program,” by Chen, discusses how their program used the OACD approach in one- and two-day immersions at a local facility and two-week immersions at an external institution. Student feedback is included, and pre- and post-in-house language assessments are listed, but no comparison data with cohorts that attended these types of immersion events are provided. This type of comparison data would provide more persuasive evidence in support of using OACD with immersion events.

Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how OACD can be integrated into a curriculum or drive content decisions. In Chapter 5, “Introducing Open Architecture Curricular Design in an Egyptian Dialect Program,” Jones describes how, early in the course, they introduced authentic materials, task-based instruction, project-based instruction, flipped learning, and formative assessment into a class, via a case study with five students. Chapter 6, “The Use of Project-Based OACD Modules in an Intermediate and Advanced Chinese Mandarin Program” (Wang), describes how a data analytics tool, the Learner Data Panel, helps with learner involvement in the selection of content. Steps ranged from the teacher identifying student needs to teacher-learner meetings to identify goals and plan instruction, to learner-teacher reflections.

## **Part 3: OACD in US Military Service Academies: Programs at the US Military Academy (West Point)**

The examples in this section highlight how OACD can be utilized in conjunction with study abroad experiences. In Chapter 7, “Emulating Proficiency-Increasing Features of the Semester Abroad

Experience through Open Architecture Curricular Design,” Gregory showcases OACD’s benefits of self-sequenced modularity, learner autonomy, and an opportunity for learners in a Chinese Media Course to engage more deeply with the language and culture and minimize language proficiency attrition after study abroad. Chapter 8, “Optimizing Flexibility in a Distance Learning Immersion Course at West Point: Three Examples of Open Architecture Curricular Design” (Maggin, Miller, Enslin, Pendergast, & Dobrunoff), showcases the benefits of OACD in how it permits teachers to tailor objectives and methods for learner needs in an online course taken by study abroad students, seeking to encourage them to reflect on their learning. The chapter includes portions of student papers intended to showcase how OACD led to transformative learning experiences, although it is not clear in the chapter the extent to which these examples were representative of all students’ experiences.

#### **Part 4: OACD in Academe**

Chapters 9 and 10 both identify the benefits of social connections and community in language learning. In Chapter 9, “Using OACD and Macrostrategies Frameworks to Enable the Practical Application of Sociocultural Theory in a College Russian Course,” Watson illustrates how OACD principles align with Sociocultural Theory, thereby enabling learner autonomy via content- and task-based learning. Students were interviewed at the end of the course, which followed a five-step process to integrate OACD, resulting in the identification of five macrostrategies and their application in a textbook-based course. Chapter 10, “Inter-Institutional Collaboration in Curriculum Development: The Design of Flexible Modules in the Less Commonly Taught Languages Partnership” (Gorp, Uebel, & Giupponi), demonstrates how OACD can be used to address budget constraints in world language courses via collaborations across institutions, starting with the creation of a community of practice for language teachers to develop the pedagogy-related skillsets they needed and acknowledging that textbooks are often not available for less commonly taught languages.

Chapters 11 and 12 featured Flagship Programs (federally sponsored programs focusing on language learning). Chapter 11, “From Reading the News to Performing the News: Using Oral Presentations as a Key of an OACD-enabled Course” (Soyan), outlines how OACD can be utilized in a Globalization course taken in conjunction with an Advanced Russian course in a Domestic Flagship Program. The chapter includes scaffolding activities that led to the culminating task of a mock news broadcast and concludes with possible adaptations into other language contexts and topics. However, the degree to which students memorized or read their presentations and the impact that had on their actual proficiency development is unclear. In Chapter 12, “Integrating Open Architecture Curricular Design in a Proficiency-Oriented, Content-Based Instruction Course in Korean,” Cheon walks readers through the sequence of classroom activities in an integrated-skills course based on film for advanced-level students, including how this course utilized social media platforms. Learners appreciated the collaborative learning and development of their critical thinking skills, though they expressed concerns related to workload.

Chapter 13, “Spiral-like Design for Teaching Inflectional Languages at Novice Level in an OACD-enabled Content-Based Instruction Course,” closes the section, with Bondarenko demonstrating

how OACD can be combined with spiral-like design to help beginning-level students learn a highly-inflected language, in this case Russian. Content included authentic or adapted internet-based resources, accompanied by discussions structured around content-based instruction with dialogs, tasks based on reasoning, writing, readings, and metacognitive discussions.

### **Part 5: Learning Assessment, Program Evaluation, and Program Management in an OACD Context**

Chapters 14 and 15 examine how Open Architecture concepts can be applied to formative assessment and program evaluation. Chapter 14, “Open Architecture Curricular Design as an Enabler of Diagnostic Instruction” (Dababneh & Yuan), describes how OACD contributes to diagnostic instruction, a form of formative assessment that includes recall protocol, and diagnostic assessment to identify learning styles. This process involves students learning via scenarios, tailored learning plans, preparatory activities, and translation and writing activities. In Chapter 15, “An Open Architecture Approach to Program Evaluation in a Language Learning Setting,” Ashby articulates how program evaluation can be conducted in an OA course. The process involves self-analysis of a program’s syllabus, curriculum, learner performance, and instructor performance using qualitative and quantitative artifacts, resulting in a list of due-outs and a presentation with discussion to stakeholders. Chapter 16, “Implementing Open Architecture Curricular Design at the Classroom and Department Level: Lessons from a Ten-Year Experience” (Oded & Oded), outlines the process of how classroom-level OACD initiatives can contribute to department-wide curricular design, moving from a focus on compliance to continuous improvement. This transformation required the fostering of organic teaching teams, a disposition toward change, and a tolerance for failure, with the team ultimately learning that collaboration led to innovation and success.

### **STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE BOOK**

A contribution the book makes to the field is offering options to the language teaching profession. The needs of many teachers and administrators are, in fact, not met by published textbooks, while at the same time, the challenges of a program creating their own language textbook are equally daunting. The chapters in this book offer snapshots of how educators can build authentic materials and tasks that have the potential to motivate students and meet their specific needs. The examples range from military contexts to language programs in general higher education. As noted by Gorp, Uebel, and Giupponi in Chapter 10, smaller language programs or less commonly taught languages often must develop their own materials, pointing out a definite benefit to these examples. The examples also range from novice to advanced language learners and across skill areas, and several chapters include information on preparing students to learn in this environment.

At the same time, the book would benefit from some additional information, if a new edition were to be published. As the book notes, teaching in an Open Architecture class requires that teachers be knowledgeable about pedagogy and about the specifics of the language they are

teaching. Yet, none of the 16 chapters sufficiently describes the sub-skills teachers need to succeed with this approach, addresses how a program might provide any necessary professional development, or conveys how programs can evaluate instructors or supervisors when they operate within this approach. Given the stated aims of the book, this level of detail seems within its scope, and without this information, readers may be inaccurately led to believe that they can implement an OACD program without developing the structures and training necessary. While textbooks are not perfect, one of their main advantages is that they offer a structure, language explanations (e.g., with grammar), and learning strategies (e.g., how to develop reading skills such as skimming or scanning) that are crucial for less-experienced teachers. In order for OACD to be successful, teachers must have the knowledge and ability to (1) assess students' specific language needs (beyond generic statements such as "listening"), (2) create learning objectives matching those needs, (3) choose authentic materials that match the specific, measurable learning objectives, (4) design activities to prepare students to succeed in learning from the authentic materials, and (5) write formal and/or informal assessments to measure student learning and make any changes to the learning plan moving forward. Examples of how program administrators can address these needs would be useful. Another opportunity for future editions would be to include more examples of language learning, vs. developing cultural competence or self-awareness. While these areas are fundamental in education, a language class is ultimately about language learning. Within language learning, including examples of how teachers can use OACD to help students develop bottom-up, micro-skills in the target language (vs. focus on meaning only) would also be beneficial.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of using authentic materials in student-centered, engaging ways is an important one for education. Few would disagree with the importance of the overall concept, but the challenge is in the details and how teachers and programs can achieve these goals, particularly in structures that can be studied at a larger level to provide more robust evidence of the benefits of the program, besides the anecdotal examples provided in this collection.

Within DLIFLC, OACD is mentioned frequently as an option to support students, particularly at the higher levels. The examples in this book can provide guidance and structure for the use of authentic materials without a textbook, particularly Wang's chapter on using the Learner Data Panel to organize and guide instruction. Approaches that are as flexible as OACD often benefit from some type of structure, and the Learner Data Panel for data-driven learner-teacher negotiation offers an interesting way to combine organization with increased communication and student agency. Department-wide conversations about how best to prepare teachers to make the most pedagogically-sound decisions when creating OACD classes will be helpful for any teachers interested in using the ideas presented in this book.