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Choosing Better Materials in Teaching English Language

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Abstract

This article deals with the choosing better materials in teaching English language in modern pedagogy as well as author tries to exemplify several notions from prominent scholars who contributed in the sphere of linguistics.

Key Words: audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids.

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Introduction. Language instruction has five important components- students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Why are materials important in language instruction? What do materials do in language instruction? Can we teach English without a textbook?

Materials control learning and teaching, they help learning and teaching. It is true that in many cases teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks, and textbooks determine the components and methods of learning, that is, they control the content, methods, and procedures of learning. Students learn what is presented in the textbook, and the way the textbook presents material is the way students learn it. The educational philosophy of the textbook will influence the class and the learning process. Therefore, in many cases, materials are the center of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom. (Allwright (1990)).

Theoretically, experienced teachers can teach English without a textbook. However, it is not easy to do it all the time, though they may do it sometimes. Many teachers do not have enough time to make supplementary materials, so they just follow the textbook. Textbooks therefore take on a very important role in language classes, and it is important to select a good textbook.

As a matter of fact, curriculum, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation should all be designed for learners and their needs. It is the teacher's responsibility to check to see whether all of the elements of the

learning process are working well for learners and to adapt them if they are not.

In other words, learners should be the center of instruction and learning. The curriculum is a statement of the goals of learning, the methods of learning, etc. The role of teachers is to help learners to learn. Teachers have to follow the curriculum and provide, make, or choose materials. They may adapt, supplement, and elaborate on those materials and also monitor the progress and needs of the students and finally evaluate students.

Materials include textbooks, video and audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids. They influence the content and the procedures of learning. The choice of deductive and inductive learning, the role of memorization, the use of creativity and problem solving, production vs. reception, and the order in which materials are presented are all influenced by the materials.

Technology, such as OHP, slides, video and audio tape recorders, video cameras, and computers, supports instruction/learning.

Though students should be the center of instruction, in many cases, teachers and students rely on materials, and the materials become the center of instruction. Since many teachers are busy and do not have the time or inclination to prepare extra materials, textbooks and other commercially produced materials are very important in language instruction. Therefore, it is important for teachers to know how to choose the best material for instruction, how to make supplementary materials for the class, and how to adapt materials.

In a study of English textbooks published in Japan in 1985, the textbooks were reviewed and problems were found with both the language and content of many of the textbooks (Kitao et al., 1995).

English textbooks should have corrected, natural, recent, and standard English. Since students' vocabulary is limited, the vocabulary in textbooks should be controlled or the textbooks should provide information to help students understand vocabulary that they may not be familiar with. For lower-level students, grammar should also be controlled. Many textbooks use narratives and essays. It would be useful to have a variety of literary forms (for example, newspaper articles, poetry, or letters), so that students can learn to deal with different forms. (Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989)).

In addition to publishers, there are many possible sources of materials. There is a lot of material available on the Internet. You can search for materials when you have free time, and store them for your future classes.

Many teachers go abroad during vacations these days, and they can collect materials in English-speaking

countries. TV and radio are good sources. They provide a variety of materials. The information is current and the language is natural, but the content has to be chosen carefully. Newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and other types of printed material are very useful. Teachers can take photos, make video tapes or record audio tapes. If they make plans before they go overseas, they may be able to make good video or audio programs.

Conclusion. Though there are five elements in language instruction, and learners should be the center of instruction. However, materials often control the instruction, since teachers and learners tend to rely heavily on them. Materials that are appropriate for a particular class need to have an underlying instructional philosophy, approach, method and technique which suit the students and their needs. They should have corrected, natural, current and standard English. Teachers need to look for good materials, both commercial and non-commercial, all the time. They also need to be aware of commercialism and copyright issues concerning materials.

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