ISBN 978-1-912588-54-1

VOLUME VII

Manuscript

The MaWSIG ebook 2023–24

MaWSIG
Materials Writing Special Interest Group

First published 2025 ISBN 978-1-912588-54-1

For more information about IATEFL MaWSIG, please visit http://mawsig.iatefl.org.

Blog posts commissioned and compiled by Luis Carabantes and Penny Hands

Edited by Penny Hands

Cover design by Ciarán Lynch, based on an original design by Georgia Styring

Design and formatting by emc design

The publisher would like to thank the contributors for their kind permission to reproduce their photographs and images.

CONTENTS

PART III: HARROGATE PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT 2023 AND SHOWCASE

On Monday, 17 April 2023, MaWSIG held its first online and face-to-face IATEFL Pre-Conference Event. In this section, we share articles following up on the sessions from that day. We were very happy to be able to offer a great line-up of presentations and networking events, and to welcome participants from around the real and online worlds. We are also happy to share contributions from the Showcase taking place on 19 April.

PART V: GUEST POSTS

In this last section we share two special guest posts.

FOREWORD

A very warm welcome to Volume VII of our annual ebook *Manuscript,* which is produced exclusively for IATEFL MaWSIG members. It is a pleasure to be the current Coordinator of MaWSIG and to write the foreword for this, the 7th in our ebook series. This volume includes 13 chapters and covers the IATEFL conference in Harrogate in April 2023, as well as a series of webinars in late 2022 to early 2023. Many of the chapters in the volume are summaries of events, but we also conclude the ebook with a special guest post.

Part 1 features a short article by our new Editor, Maria Antoniou. Roles on our committee usually last three years but can be extended by another three years. The aim is for the committee to rotate to allow different perspectives as well as opportunities for all our members to be involved. If you are interested in joining our committee, please look out for information in our member emails and ebulletins, and on the vacancies section of the IATEFL website.

Part 2 comprises five chapters which emerged from webinars between September 2022 and February 2023 given by Annie Altamirano, Walton Burns, Bethan Stokes, David Byrne and Mark Heffernan, and Catarina Pontes. Topics include writing teacher's books, self-publishing, how to get into materials writing, materials for reading skills and effective materials design. Following their talks, webinar presenters were asked a number of interesting questions by participants. The chapters in this section of the volume document these questions and our presenters' answers.

Part 3 is a collection of summaries of six insightful talks and workshops from our Harrogate Pre-Conference Event and Showcase by Nergiz Kern, Peter J. Fullager, Susanna Schwab, Lena Hertzel, Laura Broadbent and Billie Jago, and Julie Moore. The range of topics includes materials for virtual reality, inclusion and diversity, how teachers use materials, writing digital materials and how lexicography can inform materials development.

In the final section, Part 4, we are delighted to include a guest post by Debora Catavello about evaluating the authenticity of EAP materials. We are very grateful to Debora for sharing her professional experience and knowledge of this important topic.

Finally, I would like to extend a huge thank-you to all those who have made this volume possible: our fabulous writers, who have generously taken the time to share their expertise with us, and our superb publications team, comprising our Publications Coordinator Luis Carabantes, our outgoing Editor Penny Hands and our Website Coordinator Ciarán Lynch. Without their dedication and considerable expertise, we would not be able to produce such a publication.

Heather Buchanan, MaWSIG Coordinator

NILE

PART OF THE **INTO** GROUP

PART I: JOINING THE MAWSIG COMMITTEE

There have been a few changes to the MaWSIG committee since the publication of the previous volume of the ebook. In this section we introduce Maria Antoniou, our new editor.

1

MARIA ANTONIOU, EDITOR

By MaWSIG, June 2024

My passion for ELT materials began early in my teaching career. In 2014, after completing my undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature, I started working as an English teacher. I quickly saw the need for ELT materials tailored to learners' needs and designed to make learning more stimulating. In 2016, eager to deepen my knowledge, I pursued an MA in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. My dissertation focused on 'Investigating the Effectiveness of CLIL Teaching Materials' (developed by my colleagues and me). After my postgraduate studies, I worked as an editor/writer at Super Course ELT Publishing, marking the start of my journey in ELT materials development. I soon realised I wanted to design materials and be involved in publishing. I contributed to several projects as a co-writer and main editor. Working with a team of colleagues who respect each other and are passionate about their work has been a rewarding experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been part of this team.

I joined the MaWSIG committee because I want to support the SIG's work and become a member of their wonderful team. When I saw the vacancy for the Editor role, I knew it was my chance to grow both personally and professionally. I am very excited to join the team and look forward to new challenges.

Maria Antoniou *is a Senior Development Editor at Macmillan Education Iberia, Madrid, where she leads and oversees the content development of ELT components. She has several years of teaching experience and has co-written and co-edited courses for Super Course ELT Publishing.*

2

CIARÁN LYNCH, WEBSITE COORDINATOR

by Ciarán Lynch, April 2023

My journey in education began in 2009, rooted in a blend of technical and pedagogical expertise. With a background in software engineering, I transitioned into education, driven by a passion for making learning more accessible and engaging. My early work with NGOs in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Palestine opened my eyes to the transformative power of technology in education, especially in challenging learning environments.

As an educator who is deeply committed to innovative language learning solutions, I feel that MaWSIG is the perfect place to explore and contribute to materials development. My background in both technology and ELT puts me in a position to bring fresh perspectives to materials writing. I'm excited to collaborate with fellow professionals who are passionate about creating cutting-edge, interactive and inclusive learning resources.

Currently, I'm working in EdTech, focusing on developing interactive learning tools that use technologies such as artificial intelligence, instructional design and data analytics. I want to create educational materials that are both technologically advanced and engaging, accessible and fun. My mission is to empower students and educators by making language learning a more dynamic and interactive experience.

PART II: WEBINARS

Between 2022 and 2024 members of the MaWSIG committee presented a series of webinars focusing on their different areas of expertise. Here we present three blog posts summarising the three webinars from this mini-series.

3

MAWSIG MEETS TESOL SPAIN: THE WHAT, THE WHY AND THE HOW OF WRITING A TEACHER'S BOOK

by Annie Altamirano, February 2023

As part of our 'MaWSIG Meets' webinar series, ***Annie Altamirano*** *of TESOL Spain led the webinar 'MaWSIG meets TESOL Spain: The what, the why and the how of writing a teacher's book'. This post answers some of the questions that emerged during her talk.*

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE READ MANY PUBLICATIONS AND ATTENDED WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS ON MATERIALS WRITING AND ALL OF THEM SEEMED TO FOCUS ON WRITING STUDENT'S BOOKS AND ALL SORTS OF SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS. HOWEVER, I HAVEN'T SEEN AS MUCH ATTENTION GIVEN TO WRITING TEACHER'S BOOKS, WITH VERY FEW EXCEPTIONS. WHY IS THIS SO?

One reason may be because for many years, the teacher's book was barely more than an answer key, with a very limited number of pages and minimal guidance for the teacher (because of the reduced number

of pages). It was given away for free to teachers who adopted the coursebook. As a consequence, experienced teachers didn't pay too much attention to the content as there was almost nothing they didn't already know, and novice teachers didn't find the help they needed, apart from the answer keys and audio scripts.

Fortunately, things have changed.

WHAT DO YOU INCLUDE IN A TEACHER'S BOOK?

When a publisher hires a TB writer, they normally send a brief with information about the methodological framework, the structure they envisage for the TB, the scope and sequence, etc. The brief will also describe what you are expected to write. At the most basic level that would be:

- lesson notes to explain how to do the activities in the student's book
- the answer key to each activity
- audio and/or video scripts
- references to audio scripts, grammar sections, extra workbook materials, worksheets, etc.
- aims/learning intentions for the lesson or lesson sections
- suggestions for classroom management
- language background notes
- problem areas and misconceptions that are common for the level
- cross-curricular links.

WHAT KIND OF METHODOLOGY NOTES DO YOU ADD?

Even if it's not stated in the brief, I would certainly include tips, strategies and information about:

- additional or extension activities, e.g., warm-ups and plenary ideas for consolidation and wrapping up

- formative assessment ideas, peer- and self-assessment opportunities to assess understanding and progress throughout the lesson
- differentiation ideas to support less confident students or to challenge more confident ones
- critical thinking opportunities and ideas to develop 21st-century skills
- additional homework ideas and home-school links, e.g., projects, online research, recording podcasts or videos, etc.
- how to use worksheets at different levels of complexity
- how to use active learning methods to maximise learning engagement.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE WHEN A STUDENT'S BOOK AIMS TO TARGET A VERY WIDE RANGE OF COUNTRIES, OR CONTEXTS, E.G. STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT AGES OR LEARNING ENGLISH FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES?

It is very unusual for a coursebook to be aimed at different purposes and ages. A coursebook might focus on general English, English for professionals, English for specific purposes or English for exams, for example. The same applies to the question of age. Materials might be aimed at very young learners, young learners, lower secondary, adults, etc. When you are commissioned to write a TB, you know what sort of material you will be working with and the age group it is for, and this is also specified in the brief you receive.

As regards context, you need to bear in mind that the book will probably be used by teachers with different levels of training, so you have to strike a balance and offer support and guidance without sounding patronising. Sometimes the publisher will give you an indication of the expected level of training/education, but this is only possible if the materials are aimed at a specific market, and even then, there will be differences.

Access to resources is another critical issue. Not all schools, teachers and students have tablets, interactive whiteboards, laptops, mobile phones or stable internet connections. There are also schools where the use of mobile phones or tablets in the classroom is forbidden, or where video-recording students while they are working is inappropriate. Therefore, you need to give tech-free alternatives to cater for all these scenarios.

HOW MUCH CULTURAL AWARENESS DOES THE TEACHER'S BOOK AUTHOR HAVE TO PROVIDE?

The teacher's book author is not expected to be an expert, so it is usually enough to give some basic information and perhaps suggest resources that can support teachers. What I always do is include ideas about how to use this information in class to expose students to, and develop awareness and respect of, other cultures, nationalities and ethnic groups.

DON'T YOU FIND THAT STUDENTS LOVE LEARNING ABOUT FAR-OFF LANDS AND CULTURES? HOW ELSE WOULD THEY LEARN ABOUT THOSE IF THEY'RE NOT INCLUDED IN THE STUDENT BOOK?

I mentioned that when I started learning English and well into my early years as a teacher, books featured traditional white middle-class families living somewhere in England, usually London, or the US, usually New York or California, and living 'typical' middle-class lives, and that I was happy to see that more and more coursebooks aimed at the international market have moved away from British/American-centred materials to a more multicultural context.

Although students in international contexts are very likely to be interested in learning about life in English-speaking countries, I think that they will certainly benefit from using materials that help them learn about other cultures, different family types, ethnic and social groups, gender equality or human rights. And this can only be achieved if we present them with materials that reflect these realities. What you write will be largely determined by the student book content, but you can

always offer tips and ideas for discussion and extension activities that bring students closer to different realities.

You may ask Is there a perfect teacher's book? I'd say that there isn't in the same way there isn't a perfect coursebook. How useful a teacher's book is will depend on each teacher and the teaching context, but as writers, we need to do our best to understand and cater for diverse realities and experiences.

References

- The what, why and how of writing teacher's books by John Hughes, 11 November 2016, Oxford University Press ELT – https://oupeltglobalblog.com/2016/11/11/the-what-why-and-how-of-writing-teachers-books/
- The voice of the teacher's notes by John Hughes, 15 May, 2016, MaWSIG IATEFL – https://mawsig.iatefl.org/mawsig-blog-guest-post-the-voice-of-the-teachers-notes/
- How to write teacher's books, Mike Sayer and Ros Wright, training course for ELT writers Book 9, published by ELT Teacher 2 Writer.

Annie Altamirano *(MA in ELT & Applied Linguistics, University of London) is an independent teacher trainer, mentor and materials writer. She has given teacher training workshops in Europe, Asia and Latin America, and has published extensively with all major international publishers. Her latest published works include Cambridge Global English, 2nd edition, Teacher's Resource books and Cambridge IGCSE English digital teacher's resource, published by Cambridge University Press, and On Track 5 Workbook (Bavarian and national editions) published by Schöningh Verlag, Germany.*

4

THE MAWSIG PCE WARM-UP WEBINARS: SELF-PUBLISHING

By Walton Burns, April 2023

The first of our PCE Warm-Up webinar series, 'Self-publishing ELT materials', was led by ***Walton Burns****. Based on his experience running his own indie publishing company, Walton guided the audience through the steps of self-publishing. Below are some of the questions that emerged in his presentation, and that he kindly answered for those interested in self-publishing their own materials.*

IF I PUBLISH MATERIALS IN PDF FORM, HOW CAN I PROTECT PARTS OF THE DOCUMENT FROM BEING COPIED?

The short answer is that you can't, just as you can't stop people from photocopying a print book. You probably don't have to worry about sites that give away pirated materials. These websites use automated bots to download all free unprotected PDFs they can find. If you sell your PDFs online, distribute via an email list, or just password protect the download, you should be safe. I saw one of my books offered for free on a pirate site once, but it turned out to be a short freebie I'd put on my site.

However, teachers might copy your PDFs and send them to others or put them in a teacher resource folder on a computer, just as they might photocopy a worksheet and put it in a teacher resource bin in the teacher's lounge. This violates copyright law (at least in the US),

but many teachers don't know that. So, when I distribute a PDF copy of one of my books, I do three things.

1. Include a notice that the PDF copy comes with a licence for use by one teacher in their own classroom in perpetuity. Note that storing or distributing these materials violates copyright law.
2. Ask them to recommend their colleagues buy their own copy.
3. Charge a higher price for a PDF book than a print or ebook, up to two to three times more.

Does this approach work every time? Probably not. Does it stop teachers who don't care about copyright laws? No. Does it plant a seed of awareness that one should try to pay for materials? I think so. And that's all I really want, or can reasonably expect, to do.

CAN I WORK WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF EDITORS ON THE SAME PROJECT? OR MIGHT IT GET CONFUSING/MIGHT THEY GIVE CONTRADICTORY ADVICE?

You absolutely can work with different types of editors.

As I said in the webinar, there are essentially three levels of editing. **Content/developmental editing** looks at the big picture issues such as structure, organisation and how your idea is realised. **Copy editors** find typos and spelling and grammar mistakes, but also try to improve the flow, voice, cohesion and clarity. A **proofreader** looks at the final formatted manuscript to find issues with formatting and layout. Since each editor looks at different things, it's unlikely they'll give conflicting advice. You'll also want to finish each stage of editing before moving on to the next.

That being said, editing is to some extent a matter of opinion or style. No two editors are going to give exactly the same advice. Even small questions like whether to write *twenty* or *20*, when to use a semicolon, and whether it's *hair-stylist*, *hairstylist*, or *hair stylist* depend on what style guide you use. So if you do get conflicting advice, you'll have to trust your own instincts and go with the suggestion you feel is right! If nothing else, ensure you are consistent throughout your book.

DISTRIBUTING VIA VARIOUS PLATFORMS – HOW DO YOU GET THE PAYMENTS? ONCE A YEAR, READY FOR TAX RETURNS, ETC.? WHAT DO WE HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO IF SELLING ON OUR OWN WEBSITE?

Each website has its own terms; you'll want to be familiar with when, how and how much they pay. Generally speaking, platforms send out payments based on sales of your book(s) every month, though this month's payment may be for sales that happened two to three months ago.

If you're selling on your own website, you'll need to set up an online shop, and you'll need a payment processor. Wix, Squarespace and Weebly are website builders that have store functions built in. WordPress has an extension called WooCommerce that you can use to sell. If you need a separate payment processor, PayPal and Square are great options, which also allow you to take payments in person if you promote your book(s) at any conventions or conferences. They do charge a percentage of each sale, so that's something to shop around for. Keep in mind that you may need to collect sales tax on any sales that you make directly in this way. However, if you are selling through bookstores, they will collect sales tax from your customers themselves (at least in the US).

WHAT WINDOWS SOFTWARE DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR WRITING ELECTRONIC MATERIALS?

Whichever software is comfortable for you. It's nice to have a program with a spell-checker and the ability to make headings so you can organise your work. I use Word, which I got for a discount with my education email from my university. Google Docs is great, and also free, but doesn't play well with Word, so if you are working with an editor who uses Word, they might have issues. There's also a program designed for writers called 'Scrivener'. This lets you move chapters around and save your research and character notes.

I wouldn't write directly in Atticus, Vellum or InDesign as those are design programs and don't have all the bells and whistles of a good word processor. But in the end, it's whatever you have at hand and what works for you.

IF AN AUTHOR WANTED TO WORK WITH A SMALL PUBLISHER INSTEAD OF GOING ENTIRELY ALONE, AT WHAT STAGE SHOULD THEY GET IN TOUCH WITH THE PUBLISHER? SHOULD THEY SIMPLY APPROACH THE PUBLISHER WITH AN IDEA, OR SHOULD THEY HAVE READY-WRITTEN SAMPLES?

Every publisher has their own process, so the best thing to do is contact publishers individually and find out what they want. That being said, you can contact a publisher, before you've written, and explain your idea. Be sure you can describe your concept in some detail, including the book's target audience, why it is needed, and how it stands out in the market.

As I mentioned in the presentation, publishers want to make sure your book will fit into their current catalogue, and that it is something they can market and sell. A publisher may indicate that they want you to develop your idea in a particular direction. You then have to decide whether you want to write to their expectations or seek out a different publisher. Remember, if a publisher suggests a direction for materials, it's because they want to create something that will sell – not because they want to stifle creativity.

Most publishers are going to want to see the finished book before agreeing to publish it. They may also ask for samples as you work so they can see what the final product will look like. So, keep that in mind as you work with a publisher.

Walton Burns *is a teacher and materials writer from the US. He began teaching in the Peace Corps in Vanuatu. Since then, he's worked all over the world and taught a diverse range of students, from Kazakh civil servants to Chinese video game champions, and from a Saudi prince to Afghan high school students. As a materials writer, he's worked for OUP, Macmillan, Compass Publishing and more. He's also Senior Editor at Alphabet Publishing, a publishing services company for educators, specialising in editing, formatting, design and consulting.*

5

ENTERING THE WORLD OF MATERIALS WRITING

by Bethan Stokes, February 2024

Many teachers or ELT professionals have wondered, 'How do I become a materials writer?' After ten years teaching and making my own materials, this is a question that has bugged me for a long time, so I decided to try and find out. I set myself a one-year project to see how to enter the 'elusive' world of ELT materials writing. I have outlined my findings and summarised my webinar below. First of all, I encourage everyone thinking about becoming a materials writer to consider the following points:

MOTIVATION

- What got you where you are today? Think about your professional (teaching) career path. By considering and reflecting on this, it's often easier to establish why you would like to get into materials writing and which routes to explore first.
- Have you always made your own materials and now want to make this your main activity?
- Is there a lack of materials for your context? If there is, how could you fill the gap? Which publishers and writers are already working in similar fields/contexts?
- Have you got a novel idea that you think is worth sharing?

FOCUS

- Make a detailed list of all the things you want to do in relation to materials writing.
- Write down why you want to do them.
- Give yourself a timeframe, e.g. one year, six months, in which to do these things.
- Be realistic. If this is starting off as a 'side hustle', how much time and energy can you realistically devote to it?
- Try not to lose sight of why you would like to write materials.

NETWORK

- Create/update your LinkedIn profile – there's a whole world of budding ELTers on there.
- Join the conversations on LinkedIn. This can be scary at first, but it's a very friendly, welcoming community.
- Warning: avoid LinkedIn rabbit holes (i.e. try to avoid clicking on and reading post after post while worrying that you should be doing something similar.
- Be yourself: everyone has their own style, and that comes across in your work. You want people to see that.
- Attend events, e.g. IATEFL and the MaWSIG PCE.
- Mingle at events. Go and speak to people, give them a business card, make your face known. It can be a scary thing to do but if you never try, you'll never know.

LEARN

- Find a course specialised in materials writing that interests you. I did John Hughes' and Kath Bilsborough's 'Writing ELT Materials' course, which is excellent. I can't recommend it enough: https://writingeltmaterials.com/.
- Make time to regularly read, listen to and watch content that you're interested in. It's one thing saving a video or blogpost about materials writing, it's quite another sitting down and actually reading or watching it and learning from it.
- Invest in some books on the topic. One of my favourites is ETpedia Materials Writing. The ELT Teacher2Writer series is also great, and MaWSIG members get 10% off all ELT T2W ebooks on Smashwords. Just email mawsig@iatefl.org with your membership number to request the discount code. 'The No-nonsense Guide to Writing Materials', published by ELT Writers Connected, is also a must-read for anyone entering or already in the field.
- Make time to intentionally ensure you apply what you learn to the materials you create.

NICHE

- To niche or not to niche? That is the question. There are some who say you HAVE to, a few who say you don't and many who don't say anything about it.
- If you know your niche, go for it. Focus on writing material for it.
- If you think you have a niche but are unsure, find out more about it. What materials are already being written for it?
- If you don't want to niche or haven't found one (yet), that's OK. Explore the world of ELT materials and find out what sort of writing suits you best.

Once you've thought about these basics, focus more on the actual writing. Take some time to think about the materials you already write or what you would like to write. It seems simple, but thinking about the following six questions can help guide your writing and help you know where to look for work:

- Who's your audience?
- What skill(s) do you usually/like to focus on?
- What topics do you like to write about?
- Do you focus on specific learning approaches? If so, what are they?
- What are the aims of your materials?
- Do you write teacher's notes?

Once you've thought more about your materials, one other factor to consider is writing teacher's notes. Many established writers have told me that they started out writing or reviewing teacher's notes, so this is something to bear in mind. Some teachers and materials writers love them, some ignore them, some hate them. However, I have found out that writing teacher's notes can help you write better materials. Here's how:

- The process of envisaging the activities helps shape your own materials and makes sure they flow nicely.
- Teacher's notes offer support for teachers who need them and provide experienced teachers with new or different ideas.
- They help you find your writing 'voice'.
- Personally, I think teacher's notes should also be used as an opportunity for some quick CPD for teachers. That's why all my teacher's notes include a little reflection section for teachers to quickly consider after using the materials. You can see examples of this in the teacher's notes on my website: https://www.efllessons.com/

No one can really think about the creativity involved in writing good materials and not consider the impact artificial intelligence is having and will continue to have on the field. I briefly discussed this issue during the webinar, and these are my thoughts:

- AI is here to stay; embrace it as a writer and as a teacher. It's OK to get help if you need some inspiration.
- Research and try out different tools, e.g. Twee.
- Check out Nik Peachey's blog and LinkedIn for everything AI and ELT related.
- Catch up on the ElliCon2023: Humanity & Technology in ELT: Striking a Balance in the Age of AI: https://ellii.com/conference/2023.

So, you've reflected on your motivation for becoming a materials writer, you've thought about your focus, you've considered how to network, you've potentially researched some courses or books to buy, you've thought about what you write or would like to write and you're probably thinking 'What now?' I would advise the following:

SHARE YOUR IDEAS:

- Write for magazines e.g. IATEFL Voices, local teaching association magazines/blogs, modern English teacher (mEt).
- Post your ideas and materials on social media and encourage people to interact with them by posing questions or asking for feedback.
- Share your materials with colleagues (if possible) and ask them for feedback on your work.
- Create a website on which to share your materials. I created 'EFL lessons' in order to:
  - show people my work
  - hold myself accountable (I'm forced to write and apply what I'm learning.)
  - have some fun (if you can call making a website on your own fun?!)

WHERE TO START

- Join 'ELT Publishing Professionals'. As a member, you have access to CPD workshops, job opportunities and discounts for various ELT-related things, e.g. the Availlain author course: https://www.publishingprofessionals.co.uk/
- Enter the One Stop English 'Lesson Share' competition: https://www.onestopenglish.com/professional-development/lesson-share

HOW TO START

- Go back to the start of this article and answer the questions (if you haven't done so already).
- Give it a try. Whatever happens, you will learn a lot, make new connections, and know if the world of materials writing is for you.

I'm now seven months into my 'one-year project' and have learnt more than I ever imagined. One of the biggest things I've learnt as someone starting out in the field today is that you have to put in the hours and the work by networking (face to face and online), doing courses, actually writing and sharing your materials so that you and your work gets seen. If you put the time and effort in, you will get somewhere and get some leads. The big question is: Have I had any writing jobs since starting? The answer is: yes. More importantly, perhaps, I've been in touch with lots of publishers and got myself on their books. I haven't taken on, or been actively looking for, more work because my priorities have had to change. Full-time teaching job + toddler at home + second pregnancy + wanting a cup of tea in peace from time to time = little room for materials writing. If you are just starting out and life gets in the way, that's OK. The important (and often hardest) thing is to start somewhere. In the future, I would love to work as a materials writer and take a bit of a step back from teaching (but never to stop completely). By going through this process, I feel much better equipped for when that time comes and have made invaluable contacts who I know will support me.

I wish you all the best in your materials writing endeavours, and hope you enjoy your journey into the world of ELT materials writing. Please feel free to get in touch and connect:

Email: bethantefl@gmail.com

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/bethanstokes

Website: https://www.efllessons.com/

Bethan Stokes *has been teaching EFL for over ten years. She has taught in a variety of contexts in Spain and Germany, and currently teaches at the University of the German Armed Forces in Munich. Alongside teaching, she has always had a passion for materials writing and writes a lot of her own materials for her students. She also has a regular column for a local English teacher's association (MELTA), has given workshops on practical classroom activities, and has recently started her own website:* https://www.efllessons.com/

6

WRITING MATERIALS THAT DEVELOP READING SKILLS

by David Byrne and Mark Heffernan, March 2024

In training sessions on teaching reading that we've attended over the years, we've often heard it remarked that people don't read as much as they used to. However, we believe that if anything, people read more, just maybe not in the same way as they've always read. These days, our students walk around with the world in their pocket. They are constantly reading messages, articles, subtitles on videos, social media posts, books and so much more. People might not sit down and read a broadsheet from cover to cover, but that doesn't mean they don't read. We're interested in creating materials that help them to develop the skills they need to read in a modern world.

Let's begin with a few questions, questions that have been on our mind a lot over the past few years.

1. What role do coursebooks and printed materials play in our industry?
2. Why should we do we do reading in class?
3. Does knowing how well you did in a reading activity make you a better reader?

These are some pretty big questions. Let's see if we can get to the bottom of them by the end of this article.

THE ROLE OF COURSEBOOKS AND PRINTED MATERIALS IN OUR INDUSTRY

Recently, we were leading a teacher training course on materials writing. We began the course by asking the teachers what informed their teaching. They gave a range of answers, including their CELTA courses, conferences and training sessions they'd attended, and tips and feedback from their colleagues and managers. However, none of them mentioned the materials they used. When we asked them about materials, they said they tended to apply their own teaching styles to the materials they used and so, in a way, they influenced the materials they used in class as opposed to the materials influencing them. Our next activity was for the teachers to organise the key aspects of a lesson into a logical order. They then compared their ideas with a partner. In general, everyone agreed, with the exception of one activity. Half of the group were adamant that every lesson should begin by pre-teaching lexis, and then move on to discussion questions; the other half were convinced that every lesson should begin with discussion questions and then move on to lexis. What was interesting, when we began to dig deeper, was that the first group of teachers had all been teaching with the same coursebook for the past five years, a major coursebook in which the majority of the lessons begin by pre-teaching lexis.

While this was just a single group of teachers and is in no way an in-depth study, it does highlight something that we've felt for many years, and that is that our teaching is greatly influenced by the materials we use. If we use materials that are very grammar-focused, we are likely to see grammar as forming the building blocks of language, whereas if we use materials with a more lexical approach, we begin to feel that it is lexis that forms the basis of language. Over time, a teacher might be lucky enough to work with a wide range of materials and develop a questioning and informed approach to teaching.

What, therefore, is a publisher's or materials writer's role in the industry? What is their responsibility? We feel that materials writers should try to reflect the latest research into language learning – that they should be leading the industry instead of being led by it. For many teachers, the materials they use following their teaching qualification are an extension of that training. In both of our cases,

we learnt many lessons from our first coursebooks, some of which shaped our teaching for the better, and some that took us years to unlearn. One was that after every reading activity, it is important to test comprehension through exam-style activities like true/false statements, or multiple-choice questions. Now, over a decade and a half later, we question that approach.

WHY DO WE DO READING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM?

This brings us to our second question: what is the point of reading in the language classroom? It is unlikely that we can do enough reading during class time to really make a meaningful difference to our students' ability to read. After all, we know that reading extensively has one of the biggest impacts on a person's reading speed and comprehension. So why do it in class at all? Often, reading texts introduce the lesson topic, or they might also be a vehicle for language input, showing the language in use within a particular context. Both of these are completely understandable reasons for including a reading text in materials. However, we believe that there is another reason: while a student isn't necessarily going to become better at reading from the volume of reading they do in their language classroom, a reading text is an opportunity to discuss and raise awareness of the skills students need in order to become effective readers outside the classroom. It is an opportunity to bridge the gap between in-class reading and out-of-class reading, helping students to read more extensively in their own time.

But don't these skills transfer from learners' own languages? For many, they might. However, over the years we've witnessed students who were not necessarily effective readers in their own language, and who benefited from some discussion of reading skills. We've also encountered learners who were effective readers in their L1 but didn't immediately apply those skills to English without some support. We've noticed that many students read effectively in their own language but were nervous of doing so in English; they needed to first see that they were able to. All of these learners benefited from specific discussion and reflection on their reading skills.

DOES KNOWING HOW WELL YOU DID IN A READING ACTIVITY MAKE YOU A BETTER READER?

If we're trying to support our learners to become more effective readers outside the classroom, we believe we should more closely mirror their experience outside the classroom. Never in all our years of reading have we sat down with colleagues or friends and been asked a series of true/false questions about the text we've just read. We've never been asked to match a heading to a paragraph or come up with a title for a text. Yet in almost every lesson involving a reading text, we ask our learners to carry out these types of activities. Why do we do this? One could argue that it's to check their comprehension of the text, but often, it merely assesses one's ability to find specific information within a text. We're testing their ability to carry out a task, not necessarily their comprehension. But more importantly than this, are learners better readers by the end of these tasks? We would argue that they are not.

These types of activities don't mirror the world outside the classroom, and they don't make learners better readers. Why do we do them? Maybe it's just out of habit. Maybe it's because we've always done it that way.

In a less-than-snappy cry for change, what do we want?! We want activities that encourage learners to practise and discuss reading skills, that raise their awareness of how and when they should apply them in their lives outside the classroom. We want activities that mirror the real world and the reading contexts of our learners. And where do we want them? We want them on the page! As discussed above, coursebooks and printed materials have a responsibility to lead the way in our industry because their impact on teaching cannot be underestimated. With this in mind, it is important that materials should include a range of activities that help develop reading skills. We suggest that reading materials should:

- include specific instruction and discussion on reading skills
- Include further practice and discussion of the skill
- link beyond the classroom to encourage practice.

Below are some suggestions for activities that can be added to reading materials.

DON'T TEST COMPREHENSION, REVEAL IT.

As noted above, it is rare that we are tested after reading a text in real life. Of course, if you're preparing a student for a specific exam, it is important that they should be exposed to the types of activities they will encounter in the exam. However, outside of this context why not discover your students' comprehension of the text in more meaningful ways?

- Set real-world discussion questions:
- What did you enjoy about this text?
- What did you find surprising? Why?
- What did you learn from this text?
- What did you agree or disagree with? Why?
- What would you like to learn more about? How would you do so?
- Set a reaction task:
- Find a gif, image or meme online that you feel represents a character from this text. Share with your partner and discuss your reasons.
- What emoji would you use to reply if someone sent you this text? Why?
- What would you reply if someone sent a link to this text to you? Why?
- Who, among your friends or family, would you send a link to this text to?
  - Why?
  - What would you write in the message sending the link?
  - What do you think they would reply?

The advantages of these types of activities are that they more closely mirror our students' real lives and experiences with written texts, and they reveal their comprehension in a more realistic way. Through open discussions as a class or group, students are working together to increase their understanding in a meaningful way. They are learning how to do the same outside the classroom.

DISCUSS THE SKILL

So many skills are practised in a reading lesson. Before reading, students are often asked to predict what the text will be about. Then they might be asked to read the text quickly before reading it in more detail. They might be asked to identify the meaning of some key words within the text from the context, words they can then use in a speaking activity with their partners. We take it for granted that having practised these skills, learners will be able to freely apply them to texts outside the classroom. However, how aware are students of the reasons behind the activities we do? Can they see that a lesson like this one mirrors how they might scroll through articles, predicting from images and headlines what the article might be about and whether or not it's of interest to them; deciding to click in and quickly skim the first few paragraphs to decide if it's worth their time; choosing to read it in more detail; identifying the key messages and then later on telling their friends about the interesting article they read that day? From our discussions with students, it does not seem that this is the case.

A simple reflection discussion can change all of that. So many reading lessons are dominated by a large text, yet the final discussion of the lesson is topic-related. Now, we're not suggesting the topic-related discussion should be removed, but perhaps a quick reflection on the skills that have been practised and how they could be used outside the classroom could be added.

GIVE THEM A SECOND CHANCE AND MAKE IT REAL

There are lots of opportunities to practise reading in EFL materials. However, sometimes a skill is practised in isolation and then left until the next time the opportunity to practise the skill arises. The skill falls into the gap between the classroom and the real world. With just one final step, we can attempt to bridge that gap and keep skills from falling into the ether. Imagine the lesson mentioned above, in which students predict, read for gist, read for detail, identify the meaning of key words, and discuss the text with a partner: imagine if we didn't end it there. By adding the activities below, we discuss the skill and take it into the real world.

Task 1: Reflect on your reading

Number the skills you've practised today in the order you did them. Then match them to their real-life function.

☐ Read the text quickly to get the general idea.	a. To make a decision about whether or not to read the article.
☐ Summarise the text to your partner.	b. To get the general idea of the article and decide if it is interesting enough to read in full.
☐ Look at the picture and headline and predict what the text will be about.	c. To get the full idea of the article.
☐ Read the text in more detail.	d. To find the words you need to tell people about the article.
☐ Find the meaning of key words.	e. To tell your friends about the interesting article you've read.

Task 2: Take it further

Using your phone, go to an English news website of your choice. Follow the steps above. Then tell your partner about the interesting articles you've read.

OUR FINAL THOUGHTS

The influence of printed materials cannot be underestimated. They play a huge role in the ongoing training of teachers around the world. They can have an incredible impact on the industry. They are leading the way in so many areas, but when it comes to reading, materials writers often follow the same format of practising or assessing reading skills. Perhaps it's time to put the focus on developing skills and bringing them into the real-world contexts of our students.

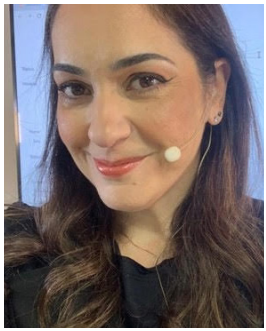
Mark Heffernan *has taught English for over 18 years. From the very beginning, he shared lesson ideas and started to run CPD sessions. He spent many years focusing on exam teaching before moving to Queen Mary University of London in 2016, where he teaches EAP and is a module convenor.*

David Byrne *has worked in EFL for over a decade, and in that time has taught all the ages, levels and exams he can find. He's worked in Ireland, England, Spain and South Korea, but the majority of his career has been spent in the UK, where he currently works for EC English.*

Together, they manage a popular blog called 'Textploitation', and have co-written teacher resource and methodology books called 'Textploitation' and 'Overt Teaching'.

7

STATING THE (NOT SO) OBVIOUS: 5 TIPS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE MATERIALS DESIGN



by Catarina Pontes, April 2024

In this post, ***Catarina Pontes*** *summarises the talk she gave at the MaWSIG and BrazTESOL Joint Online Conference in November 2023, where she presented five different ways in which teachers can adapt materials to make their learners feel more engaged and make the most of their learning experience.*

When designing a new English language teaching coursebook, it goes without saying that we need to consider some basic principles like taking the target audience into account. But what does that really mean? How do we go about making informed decisions to provide learners with a meaningful, relevant learning experience as we go through the process of materials writing?

As a novice teacher (way back in the day!), I remember simply designing and selecting activities for classroom use based on the fact that they were fun (at least, they were for me!) and somehow related to the topic being taught. Sure, they were age-appropriate, mostly level-appropriate, but the task design and the extent to which they were suitable for the students and the course were certainly questionable.

Fast-forward a few years and a few courses later, plus a few years of teaching and course design experience, and the way I approach task and materials design has significantly improved (phew!). I am proud to have been part of the organisation and coordination of a course series that was nominated for the ELTons in the Innovation in Learner Resources Category (here it is in case you are curious*: ELTons Innovation Awards 2022 – Finalists*

In this post, I share five tips to consider next time you are at your desk planning and writing your upcoming classroom activities or your new course materials.

1 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing the target audience you are writing for certainly goes beyond stating the age range. Say the materials being designed are aimed at pre-school children – what characteristics do you immediately think of? Some of the items that should be on your list are: fine and gross motor skills, literacy, translanguaging and stages of development. Some other important steps to be included in the pre-development stage are: conducting research (be it desk or field research, or even working with focus groups), analysing data and conducting lesson observations. If your materials are aimed at teenagers or young adults, carefully selecting the topics and how they can be easily adapted considering different demographics is equally important. And if you have the chance to test and adapt your materials before they are officially launched, so much the better. This will help you try out your ideas and stand a much better chance of success.

2 INCLUSION MATTERS

Diversity, equity and inclusion have always mattered. If learners identify with, and feel represented in, the materials they use to learn a language, their learning experience will be greatly improved. Moreover, making sure materials are accessible, and that they cater for all learners' needs (whether in printed or digital format) will have a significant impact and make a positive impression on learners. Consider how you can offer them the opportunity to customise the materials based on specific needs, such as those experienced by

students with low vision or colour-blindness. Informed decisions regarding choice of fonts, colours, activity types, and how they facilitate the experience both in and outside of the classroom must always be considered. Careful selection of images and topics cannot be overlooked, either. Portraying a range of body types, age ranges, skin and hair colours, as well as different ethnic backgrounds, to name just a few considerations, will make your materials more relevant to a wider audience.

3 THINK GLOBAL, DESIGN LOCAL

Coursebooks designed for international use may fall prey to traps, such as asking learners to come up with solutions to problems that are not relevant to their context. Presenting a global problem like climate change and challenging students to think of local solutions will bridge the gap as you bring the use of the target language closer to their reality. Encouraging and inviting critical thinking, especially in classrooms where learners (such as those who have completed their studies) no longer have the opportunity to do so elsewhere can contribute significantly to the process of language learning, too. Seeing more immediate applicability to the language they are studying might help learners feel more connected with their studies.

4 ALLOW FOR PERSONALISATION

Back in the day, Stephen Krashen stated (in Rounds, 2011) that 'we all learn languages in the same way – when it makes sense to us'. With that in mind, it makes sense to use learners' background knowledge and their own contributions to personalise the activities done in class, such as information gap activities, drilling or role play. Going beyond the coursebook and thinking about the teaching itself, learning can be even more memorable when teachers welcome situations that allow for questions about incidental language, and when they make good use of teachable moments. Deviating from the original plan (and from the coursebook) to make lessons more relevant and memorable will contribute to making learners feel they are in a safe learning environment, and is likely to lead to greater levels of engagement.

5 USE AND ABUSE OF CORPORA

I believe I speak for all course designers and teachers when I say that we all want learners to communicate effectively. With that in mind, we might need to let go of old habits and incorporate new ones when writing materials. For example, if you are new to the business, you might need to 'unlearn' some things and 'relearn' the way you see language. We also know that everyday language does not always follow the rules we learnt at school. Pragmatics play a crucial role in materials design, and it is a great thing that we have a number of tools and resources to help us here. Corpus websites (such as the BNC or COCA), online dictionaries based on corpora (such as Linguee), and sources like YouGlish (which guides us on the pronunciation of names of people, brands and places) are go-to resources. Streaming services are also a great way to combine work and pleasure, as they provide us with a constantly updated source of examples of how language is currently used in different English-speaking contexts, and these can guide us on what to include (or not) in the materials we are writing. After all, we all want to have materials that offer real-life English as opposed to the infamous 'textbook English', don't we?

In addition to the five tips given above, here is a bonus one: make sure you include a range of accents in the audio tracks and a variety of 'Englishes' in your materials. We need to help learners know and understand that communicating in English today goes way beyond the dominant British and American varieties, and that even these offer a whole world of options. We have been talking about ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) for so many years now, but how much of its features have actually been included in coursebooks? How much do we talk about it in lessons? How much of it is considered when assessing learners?

Educating learners about the role of the most widely spoken language in the world can start in the materials we produce. The discussion has to continue in the classroom and in ELT forums alike. This can contribute to learners communicating more effectively, developing awareness, showing respect to different varieties, and fighting linguicism, too. This is the beauty of education in the foreign language classroom. It is even more exciting to think it can start with the materials we write.

Best of luck in this journey and feel free to share your own tips with me!

References

- British Council, 2022. ELTons innovation awards 2022 – Finalists. [online] Available at: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/eltons-2022/eltons-innovation-awards-2022-finalists-0 [Accessed 7 February 2024].
- Collins, 2021. COBUILD: The evolving corpus – How corpus use has changed over the years. [online] Available at: https://collins.co.uk/blogs/collins-elt/cobuild-the-evolving-corpus-how-corpus-use-has-changed-over-the-years [Accessed 20 November 2023].
- EFL Magazine, no date. 4 ways to decolonize your English classes. Available at: https://eflmagazine.com/.
- LinkedIn, 2023. Learning to write (better) ELT materials. [video online] Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/events/learningtowrite-better-eltmater7127250166016823296/comments/ [Accessed 19 November 2023].
- Rounds, M., 2011. Stephen Krashen on language acquisition. [video online] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiTsduRreug [Accessed 7 February 2024].

Catarina Pontes *has been in education for over 25 years. She is an Executive Educational Products Manager at CNA Idiomas. A DELTA holder and CELTA trainer, Catarina is the co-author of Getting into Teacher Education – a Handbook. Catarina is also the former president of BRAZ-TESOL's São Paulo Chapter, and former IATEFL PronSIG Coordinator.*

PART III: HARROGATE PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT 2023 AND SHOWCASE

On Monday, 17 April 2023, MaWSIG held its first online and face-to-face IATEFL Pre-Conference Event. In this section, we share articles following up on the sessions from that day. We were very happy to be able to offer a great line-up of presentations and networking events, and to welcome participants from the real and online worlds.

8

IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE DESIGN FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN VIRTUAL REALITY

by Nergiz Kern, July 2023

With an increasing interest in virtual reality for education and the developments around the metaverse, Nergiz Kern is often asked by publishing and teaching professionals what makes good learning experiences in virtual reality (VR) and how to write lesson plans for immersive language learning in VR. In this blog post, Nergiz summarises the main points of her talk about using VR in the design of materials at the MaWSIG PCE in Harrogate.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING IMMERSIVE LESSONS

First of all, it is important to know that these tips are for classes that take place within a virtual world shared by the learners and the teacher, and where they can do things together. This is often called multi-user VR or social VR. When educational technology moves from being just a tool to becoming the learning environment, we have to fundamentally rethink how we teach with this technology, and how we design pedagogically sound lessons for this environment.

1 KNOW WHY VR IS GOOD FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Before we think about any content or activities, we first need to understand what research tells us about how virtual reality supports language learning. This will help us to match appropriate language learning pedagogies with the benefits of immersive learning in VR. Pedagogy should not be an afterthought but an integral part of developing language lessons in VR.

Fortunately, there is a lot of research now. For our purposes, we should note that the two most important features of VR are immersion and interactivity. These features enable learners to have experiences that are more like 'real-life' experiences than those in traditional classroom or in online lessons. The 'real-life' nature of VR learning means that it can and should be active, social and emotional. Learners can participate in field trips, collaborate on hands-on projects, and engage in contextualised role plays and simulations.

All of these experiences make language learning more authentic, motivational, fun and memorable, while also reducing anxiety. In this way, VR language lessons can help teachers to achieve their goals of creating more contextualised, active and experiential learning opportunities, based on task-based and problem-solving teaching approaches. Suitable pedagogical approaches to achieve this are:

- situated learning
- task-based learning
- problem-based / project-based learning
- collaborative learning
- total physical response (TPR)
- active learning
- experiential learning
- game-based learning

2 FOLLOW A FRAMEWORK TO ACHIEVE HIGH IMMERSION

Immersion can be achieved not only through the VR technology (for example, the VR headset) but also through engaging users mentally, in the same way that someone can be immersed in a good book or activity. The latter, more expansive, definition of immersion is important because it does not limit the experience of immersion to a VR headset. There are many different frameworks (outlined here) that integrate the various types of immersion.

Won et al.'s (2023) conceptual framework of design features for immersive educational VR builds on previous immersion frameworks. It is clear and concise, easy to understand, and combines technological and pedagogical factors for immersive learning that can help us plan well-rounded, highly immersive VR lessons. Their framework includes four types of immersion: sensory, actional, narrative and social. Table 1 shows how these elements play an important role in the design of a good language learning experience – whether in the classroom or online.

Enyedy & Yoon (2021) explain how these four types of immersion apply to headset VR as well as desktop VR (amongst others). This is particularly important for those who cannot or do not want to use a VR headset. For example, desktop VR allows learners to experience sensory immersion through customising their avatar, and actional immersion through moving their avatar to navigate through the virtual world. Narrative immersion is experienced through the whole story line that a virtual world, scene or lesson is based on. Opportunities for agency and choice (where to go, what activities to do) are also elements of narrative immersion. And finally, an experience that offers opportunities for meeting, chatting and doing things with other learners adds social immersion. All of this can be achieved in desktop VR through careful planning.

Conceptual Framework: Design Features for Educational IVR

Sensory	**Representational fidelity**. The presented virtual environment is representationally sound for learners to feel the virtual objects and places are authentic or real.	Graphic, sounds haptics, feedback, other senses
Actional	**Intuitive interface design**. The actions in a virtual environment feel natural and intuitive for learners to feel they are making real changes in the environment.	Interactivity Movements (physical body to experience)
Narrative	**Engaging content and tasks**. The content and tasks are relevant and meaningful for learners to feel emotionally and intellectually engaged.	Roles Context Challenges
Social	Constructive support. The learners and learning are supported through social interactions.	Mediated social interactions
Won et al. (2023). Diverse approaches to learning with immersive virtual reality identified from a systematic review.		

Table 1: Conceptual framework of design features for immersive educational VR

3 KNOW THE FEATURES AND ACCESS OPTIONS OF THE VR PLATFORM

Digital course authors need to familiarise themselves with the type of activities that are possible on a platform, for example, multiple-choice questions, matching activities, true/false exercises, as well as some other technical and non-technical features. The same is true for VR. Each VR platform is different. The activities that will be possible depend on these features as well as technical specifications such as how the platform can be accessed (VR headset, desktop, web browser, operating system, etc.), how many people (or avatars) can be in the same space, and so on. Here are a few other features to consider:

- level of object interactivity
- possibility and level of avatar customisation
- availability of spatial (3D) sound
- what kinds of scenes are available
- possibility of building or customising scenes
- availability of teaching tools (e.g., writing, screens, video or PDF embeds).

4 CREATE A CHECKLIST TO INTEGRATE ALL ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Trying to keep all of the above (in addition to the content and learning objectives) in mind can feel overwhelming, and it is easy to forget something.

Creating and following a checklist, an incomplete one of which is shown in Table 2, will help us design the right kind of learning activities without losing sight of any important elements for effective immersive language experiences.

The three areas that we need to include are:

- lesson objectives and design: This is what teachers are already familiar with from writing for any other medium. We just need to make sure that the activities are in line with the pedagogical approaches that are suitable for VR (as discussed above).

- VR affordances: This draws from the VR immersion framework.
- tools and materials: This is informed by the list of VR app or platform features.

LOs, Lesson design	**VR affordances**	**Tools/ Materials**
Language / Grammar / Lesson design	Sensory / Actional / Narrative	
• Is key vocab/ grammar included? • Is the level appropriate? • Are activities linked to the lesson aim? • Are there different types of activities across lessons (role-play, interviews, etc.)? • Is there an element of personalisation? • …	• Do the scenes and objects feel authentic? • Is spatial (3D) audio on? • Plenty of opportunities to move, gesture and interact? • Is there a coherent narrative? • Are the tasks relevant, meaningful? • Are there opportunities for authentic communication? • …	• Is the scene appropriate for the topic and activities? • Is there a group space or breakout opportunity? • Are the objects, scripts, etc., needed for the lesson ready? • Have all the lesson instructions, texts, quizzes, and games been uploaded and saved? • …

Table 2: Checklist for a successful VR experience

Now you are ready to write the lesson plans and materials.

5 PRACTISE WRITING VR LESSONS

As with everything, creating effective lessons for VR takes time and practice. Here are a few steps you can take to become a good VR language learning materials writer:

- Sign up for free accounts of VR platforms.
- Learn to use them.
- See what features they offer and make a list.
- Take a coursebook unit or think of a typical activity and think about how you would teach the same lesson in VR.
- Look at your checklist. Did you include everything?
- If you have a chance, teach trial lessons.
- Join a community of practice.
- Read my blog and VR learning resources and follow me on Linkedin.

By following the steps above when creating immersive learning lessons, materials writers can become learning experience designers in the truest sense.

Nergiz presenting at the 2023 MaWSIG PCE in Harrogate

Nergiz Kern *is a consultant and foresight practitioner on emerging technologies and learning futures. She works with EdTech companies and learning organisations on the pedagogically sound development and implementation of technology for learning. She also provides futures workshops to create and work towards desirable futures for language learning and teaching. She has an MA in EdTech and TESOL, a postgraduate certificate in using 3D Multi-User Virtual Worlds in Education, a certificate as a futurist, and 20+ years of teaching experience.*

9

I AM NOT A TABOO: LGBTQIA+ IN THE ELT CLASSROOM

by Peter Fullagar, May 2023

I am one of the growing number of open LGBTQIA+ ELT professionals making noises about representation in materials, coursebooks and resources. Other notable contributors to this area include Tyson Seburn and Thorsten Merse, who gave engaging and informative presentations at the 2023 IATEFL conference.

My workshop took its name from a well-known and well-used resource book about controversial issues, which has one chapter called Gays and Jobs. Although written in the early 2000s, the book has questions such as Do you think that there are any jobs which homosexuals should not be allowed to do?, thereby questioning identity rather than ability.

It has been well documented that LGBTQIA+ identities are invisible in ELT materials, so delegates were asked to discuss the quote 'You cannot be what you cannot see', initially coined by Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund. Responses echoed a similar and familiar tone – representation matters.

The need to be inclusive is highlighted by research conducted by Just Like Us called Growing up LGBT+ in 2021. The survey was conducted in the UK, consisting of 2,934 students aged between 11 and 18.

Disturbing statistics include:

- 91% of LGBT+ students heard negative language about being LGBT+ in the past year.
- 17% of LGBT+ students heard negative language about being LGBT+ on a daily basis.
- 42% of LGBT+ school pupils were bullied in the past year (21% of non-LGBT+).
- 48% of pupils had little-to-zero positive messaging about being LGBT+ in school.

The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities in school has harmful effects. Some effects of invisibility discussed in the workshop include mental health issues, shame, isolation, lack of self-worth and not feeling confident or important. In the UK, Section 28 was legislation that banned discussion of homosexuality from 1988 until 2003 (2000 in Scotland). You can read more about Section 28 from LGBT+ History Month.

Delegates were shown two approaches to incorporating LGBTQIA+ identities in materials using my own resources as examples: (1) usualisation, coined by Professor Sue Sanders, and (2) disruption, as explored by Tyson Seburn.

Usualisation demonstrates that identities are usual, with usual jobs, responsibilities and roles – their identity is not a focal point for discussion, and is not up for debate. Usualisation is preferred over normalisation, as the latter implies that something is abnormal. For example, *Daily Life* (A2) has a gapfill exercise about a man who happens to be in a relationship with another man. This is usualised in the sense that the text does not explicitly draw attention to the man's sexual identity. Disruption, on the other hand, confronts social issues and highlights characteristics and experiences of marginalised communities, thus helping to support critical thinking. The example of disruption that was given was from *Sexuality and Employment* (B2+), which has a reading about LGBTQ+ discrimination in the workplace.

Delegates were then asked to look at ten images and to consider how they would use them in a piece of material; to consider learning outcomes, level, skill, target language and headings. These images came from my resource *Family Units* (B2).

It's important that discrimination is challenged in classrooms, but most of all, that students and teachers feel safe. I would like to thank Laïla El-Metoui for bringing this to my attention: challenging homophobia is not about changing people's minds, it's about developing student ability to express opinions in a non-offensive way. It's essential to demonstrate to students the differences between acceptance and agreement; insult and opinion; normative and normal; religious teaching vs personal interpretation.

The workshop concluded with four remarks:

- Including LGBTQIA+ identities in materials can help erase prejudice.
- LGBTQIA+ identities can be represented in ELT materials.
- LGBTQIA+ students and teachers deserve to see themselves represented.
- LGBTQIA+ identities are not a taboo.

The workshop was a full session, and I was extremely pleased that delegates approached the workshop with enthusiasm and engagement. For more information on my work, my services and my materials, go to www.peterjfullagar.co.uk.

Peter J Fullagar is a cis gay/queer Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant, editor and writer in the ELT industry. He has 17 years' teaching experience and five years' publishing experience in the field. He has been making inclusive resources for just over a year, with the aim of representing LGBTQIA+ identities, in addition to disability, age and further marginalised communities

10

MOVING AWAY FROM A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH WHEN USING PRESCRIBED ELT MATERIALS

by Susannah Schwab, July 2023

In this talk, I shared findings from a research project that I conducted between 2018 and 2021 about how teachers use a compulsory ELT coursebook with six primary school teachers in Switzerland. I then focused on two findings that emerged from the study and which had not been anticipated in the research.

Although the teacher's guide claims to be based on task-based language teaching, the teachers did not use this approach in their lessons. The teacher's guide claims that the coursebook uses Task-Based Learning (TBL). Having observed teachers for more than 100 lessons (45 minutes each), I found out that the traditional PPP approach was used more or less constantly. Teachers and learners used up so much of the 45-minute-lesson with the presentation and practice phase that time had run out well before reaching the production phase. The two pages of the coursebook *New World 1* (Arnet-Clark et al., 2013) shown in Figures 1a and 1b illustrate the approach most teachers used.

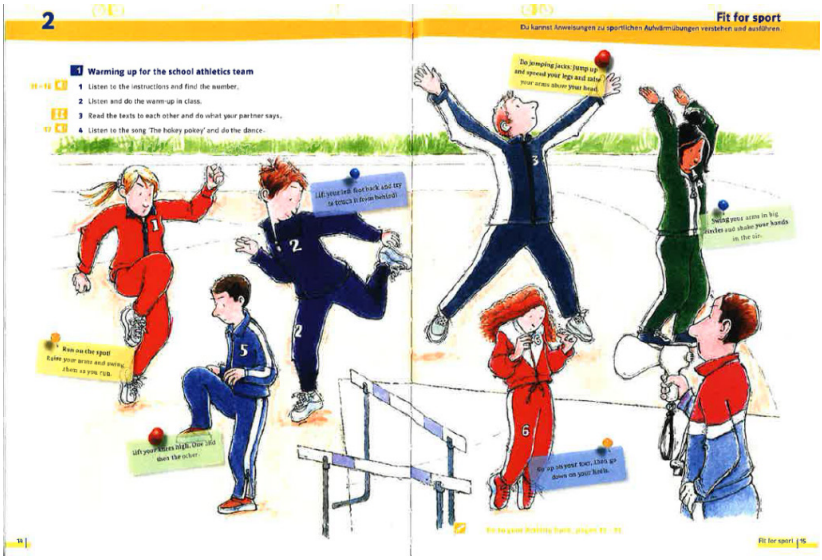


Figure 1a New World Pupil's Book (PB), pp. 14–15

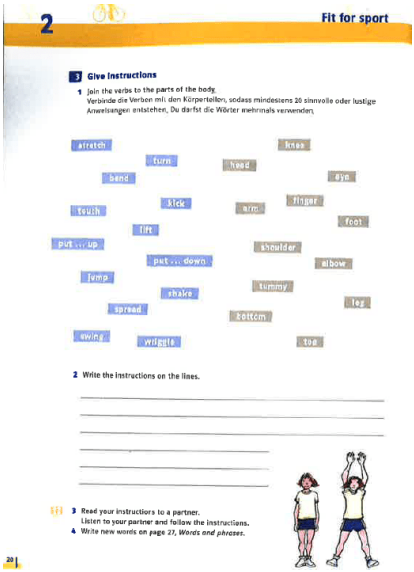


Figure 1b New World Activity Book (AB), p. 20.

Figure 1a shows the warm-up activity (PB, Ex 1.4, Hokey Pokey song and dance) that several teachers used to begin the lesson. The learners were already familiar with the song and dance from a previous lesson. The students were then asked to sit down, open their AB at page 20 and do Exercise 3.1.

Moving on to Exercise 3.2, some learners managed to write a few instructions, but when it came to the only communicative activity (Exercise 3.3), time had run out. In the next lesson, teachers moved on to the following page and started work at the top of the page. Again, they managed to complete two thirds of the lesson at most, missing out on the production phase.

I concluded that when teachers closely follow the coursebook and work their way through the materials step-by-step, little or no TBL can be observed. In addition, there was hardly any communicative interaction, and learners rarely engaged cognitively or affectively with the materials.

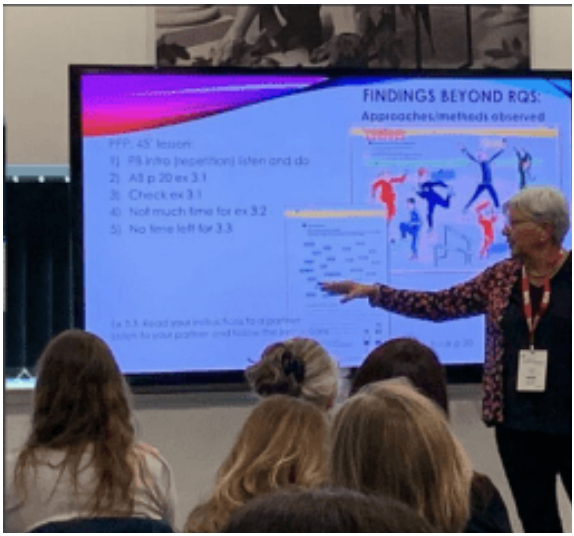
In quite a few cases, it would have been possible to tweak activities to allow for greater communicative interaction (see Tomlinson, 2018, for more ideas on how to do this). For the coursebook *New World*, I suggest that teachers could start 'upside-down', meaning that they would start out with a version of the last activity on the page (that is, the communicative one). If doing this, teachers would have to embed more scaffolding (to cater for less able students), and ensure that communicative interaction is necessary to fulfil the task. Thus, a genuine TBL approach would be used, ensuring that learners were engaged both cognitively and affectively.

The second finding focused on the title of my talk – 'Moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach'. The coursebook seems to offer little help to teachers who wish to cater to a variety of abilities. Schwab (2019) analysed the four most popular mandatory primary school ELT coursebooks used in Switzerland. According to the *New World* teacher manual, differentiated instruction is offered with the help of worksheets. When I observed six teachers teaching Unit 2 of the coursebook *New World 1*, I focused on the worksheets contained in Unit 2. There are eleven worksheets: seven are said to be for more advanced or faster learners and four for less able learners. However, ten of the eleven

worksheets consist of closed exercises with none of them offering any clear differentiation. This impression was reinforced by the fact that the whole class was working on the same closed exercise at the same time.

On reflection, in my role and context as a teacher educator training pre-service primary school teachers to teach English as a foreign language, I think I could highlight materials evaluation and development even more. Further, greater emphasis should be put on enabling teachers to carry out more formative assessment, give individualised feedback to their learners, and cater for mixed-ability learners. My colleagues in in-service teacher education could emphasise the importance of materials development and evaluation with a focus on reflective practice and a critical analysis of materials, for example, by encouraging teachers to carry out action research.

In general, I would like to see more professional development programmes that focus on teachers engaging critically with their (prescribed) coursebook and that reflect on the value of particular activities for specified learners. Even when working with prescribed materials, teachers do have agency (at least in Switzerland), so we should not have to ask the question: Are you teaching the book or are you teaching the learners?



Susanna presenting at the 2023 MaWSIG PCE in Harrogate

References

- Arnet-Clark, I., Frank Schmid, S., Grimes, L., Ritter, G., & Rüdiger-Harper, J. (2013). New World – English as a second foreign language. Klett und Balmer AG.
- Schwab, S. (2019). Differentiation in English language teaching coursebooks for primary schools in Switzerland. Babylonia – Zeitschrift für Sprachunterricht und Sprachenlernen, (1), 88–94.
- Tomlinson, B. (2018). Making typical coursebook activities more beneficial for the learner. In Bao, D. Creativity and innovations in ELT materials development (pp. 21–34). Multilingual Matters.

Susanna Schwab *is a teacher educator at the Bern University of Teacher Education, Switzerland. Since 2006 she has been training pre-service primary school teachers to teach English as a (second) foreign language. Her main research areas include coursebook use, coursebook awareness, the transfer of innovative concepts into the classroom, differentiating instruction and vocabulary learning, and teaching using a multilingual approach. Her latest publication, Teachers' use of an EFL textbook at primary school in Switzerland (Cambridge Scholars, 2022), disseminates findings from her research into how teachers use a prescribed coursebook. Susanna can be contacted at susanna.schwab@phbern.ch.*

11

DECOLONISING ELT MATERIALS: CHALLENGING WESTERN SUPREMACY AND PROCESSES OF OTHERING, USING THE EXAMPLE OF AFRICA

Session by Lena Hertzel July 2023

Postcolonial power structures and knowledge archives continue to shape our society and the perceptions and actions of individuals who have grown up in this society (Marmer & Sow, 2015, pp. 22–23). Educational institutions and areas such as ELT, including educators and coursebook publishers, are no exception. Rather, as a part of society, they tend to contribute to a perpetuation of these power structures and knowledge archives on several levels (Autor*innenKollektiv, 2015, pp. 5–6).

One of these levels is teaching materials, and coursebooks in particular, because they have a strong potential to stabilise prevailing discourses of power. This is because they are considered socially relevant and worthy of teaching, being associated with official knowledge that has been proven (Bönkost, 2020, p. 21). Indeed, current studies show that teaching materials often perpetuate postcolonial power structures and knowledge archives (Alter, König, & Merse, 2021; Awet, 2019;

Bönkhost, 2020; Mamer & Sow, 2015). Against this background, decolonising practices are required in order to challenge these conventions (Autor*innnenKollektiv, 2015).

But what does it mean to 'decolonise teaching materials'? To answer this question, I will use the example of Africa to set out three aspects for consideration.

The first aspect is awareness: as educators, we need to be aware of postcolonial power structures and modes of representation so as to be able to identify and challenge them in our lessons and teaching materials. This includes challenging our own complicity with these structures and modes of representation (Autor*innnenKollektiv, 2015, pp. 13–15 & 19–20). Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) urges us to avoid what she terms the 'single story of Africa' (00:05:02 – 00:05:05), in which Africa is portrayed in either an 'Afro-romantic' or an 'Afro-pessimistic' mode (Adichie, 2009, 00:06:03 – 00:06:20; Marmer & Sow 2015, p. 17). While the former represents Africa as a timeless and heavenly place with breathtaking natural landscapes and wild animals where 'exotic' adventures can be experienced far away from 'civilisation' (Nduka-Agwu & Bendix, 2007), the latter constructs Africa as the deficient and 'underdeveloped' 'other', without agency and in need of help from Western countries (Jacobs & Weicker, 2015, p. 204). Both modes of representation have their roots in colonialism, and construct Africa as a homogeneous entity in contrast to the West, whereby Africa becomes the stereotypical 'other' (Marmer & Sow, 2015, p. 17).

To move beyond this Eurocentric single story, we need to consider the importance of representation. A starting point for this discussion is the inclusion of African countries and the African diaspora in teaching materials, through which Africa's diversity should be embraced, and multi-perspectivity considered. Ways of doing this include highlighting the continent's cultural and linguistic diversity and using non-stereotypical representations. Moreover, we can challenge Eurocentric representations of Africa by including African and Black perspectives and sources, and by portraying them with agency in all social roles. Africa should be approached by its own norms, standards and values – and not by Western ones (Autor*innnenKollektiv Rassismuskritischer Leitfaden, 2015, pp. 25 & 42–45).

Now let us imagine that we are aware of postcolonial power structures and our own complicity (i.e. we have awareness), and are also able to design teaching materials that include multi-perspectivity and embrace diversity (i.e. they demonstrate representation). What would we be missing if we stopped here? Ongoing postcolonial power structures would be rendered invisible as they would not play any role in our materials. Thus, deconstruction matters just as much as representation (Autor*innnenKollektiv Rassismuskritischer Leitfaden, 2015, pp. 34, 38 & 49; Castro Varela, 2015, pp. 310–311; Bönkost, 2020, p. 88). Students need not only to get to know the diverse stories of Africa, Africans and Black people (representation), but also to learn to identify postcolonial power structures in their contexts, and to critically reflect on the impact of these on society and on themselves (deconstruction).

Below are some guiding questions for materials writers. The list is far from exhaustive and should therefore be considered as a starting point only.

AWARENESS

- How does my own socialisation affect the materials I choose and design?
- Do my materials include Eurocentric and racialised representations of Africa?
- Which parts of any existing materials should I drop and which can I keep for critical discussions?

REPRESENTATION

- Are African and Black perspectives, voices and sources included?
- Are Africans and Black people portrayed with agency?
- Are non-stereotypical representations provided?
- Is Africa approached by its own norms, standards and values?

DECONSTRUCTION

- Is the single story of Africa made visible and put in its colonial context?
- Are there opportunities to critically reflect on the various ways colonial continuities structure our societies and the way we interact?
- Are there opportunities for students to critically reflect on their own entanglement in these power hierarchies?

References

- Adichie, C. N. (July, 2009). The danger of a single story (video). TED Talk. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
- Alter, G., König, L., & Merse Thorsten (2021). All inclusive? Eine kritische Lehrwerksanalyse zur Repräsentation von Diversität in den Englischlehrwerken für verschiedene Schulformen. Inklusion. Zeitschrift Für Fremdsprachenforschung (ZFF), 32(1), 81–104.
- Autor*innenKollektiv Rassismuskritischer Leitfaden (2015). Rassismuskritischer Leitfaden. Zur Reflexion bestehender und Erstellung neuer didaktischer Lehr- und Lernmaterialien für die schulische und außerschulische Bildungsarbeit zu Schwarzsein, Afrika und afrikanischer Diaspora. https://www.elina-marmer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/IMAFREDU-Rassismuskritischer-Leiftaden_Web_barrierefrei-NEU.pdf
- Awet, K. (2018). Die Darstellung Subsahara-Afrikas im deutschen Schulbuch: Gesellschaftslehre, Erdkunde, Geschichte und Politik der Sekundarstufe I (Gesamtschule) in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Budrich UniPress.
- Bönkost, J. (2020). Konstruktionen des Rassendiskurses in Englisch-Schulbüchern. In K. Fereidooni & N. Simon (Eds.), Rassismuskritische Fachdidaktiken: Theoretische Reflexionen und fachdidaktische Entwürfe rassismusskritischer Unterrichtsplanung (pp. 19–47). Springer.

- Castro Varela, M. (2020). Postkoloniales Lesen: Hegemoniale Wissensproduktion und postcolonial literacy. Journal Für International und Interkulturell Vergleichende Erziehungswissenschaft, 26(1), 84–95.
- Castro Varela, M. (2015). Koloniale Wissensproduktionen: Edwards Saids ‚interpretative Wachsamkeit' als Ausgangspunkt einer kritischen Migrationsforschung. In J. Reuter & P. Mecheril (Eds.), Schlüsselwerke der Migrationsforschung: Pionierstudien und Referenztheorien (pp. 307–322). Springer VS.
- Jacobs, I., & Weicker, A. (2015). Afrika. In S. Arndt & N. Ofuatey-Alazard (Eds.), Wie Rassi mus aus Wörtern spricht: (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache: ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk (2nd ed., pp. 200–214). UNRAST Verlag.
- Marmer, E., & Sow, P. (2015). Rassismus, Kolonialität und Bildung. In E. Marmer & P. Sow (Eds.), Wie Rassismus aus Schulbüchern spricht: Kritische Auseinandersetzung mit „Afrika"-Bildern und Schwarz-Weiß-Konstruktionen in der Schule – Ursachen, Auswirkungen und Handlungsansätze für die pädagogische Praxis (pp. 14–25). Beltz Juventa.
- Nduka-Agwu, A., & Bendix, D. (2007). Die weiße Darstellung ‚Afrikas' in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit: Wie ein Kontinent genormt, verformt und verdunkelt wird. https://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/2007-Afrikabild.htm

---

Lena Hertzel *(she/her) is a research assistant in EFL Education at the University of Duisburg-Essen. She studied English and History at the University of Münster, graduating with a master's degree in education in 2022. She spent a year abroad in Ghana as a volunteer at PEC School in Nsawam Adoagyiri. Her research interests revolve around intercultural and transcultural learning, global citizenship education and anti-racist education. Her PhD project focuses decolonising cultural learning.*

12

WRITING DIGITAL ELT MATERIALS

by Laura Broadbent and Billie Jago, September 2023

Otterelt is a digital ELT agency providing digital content expertise and editorial services to leading publishers and educational institutions.

Digital materials are crucial in today's English language learning landscape. They have the ability to enhance accessibility, interactivity and personalisation like never before. Digital resources now offer a wealth of advantages that empower learners to engage with the language on a deeper level.

One of the most significant advantages of digital materials is their accessibility. With just a few clicks, learners can access a vast array of digital content, ranging from interactive e-books, self-study apps, gamified language learning apps, online articles, audiovisual resources, language learning apps, videos and web-based learning platforms, to name just a few. The ease of access allows learners to learn at their own pace, enabling them to fit language learning into their busy schedules and embrace self-directed learning.

Digital materials provide an immersive and interactive learning experience. They can integrate audio recordings, videos, and interactive exercises, which captivate learners' attention and stimulate multiple senses. Interactive platforms enable learners to actively participate in language activities, practise pronunciation, engage in real-life conversations through voice and video calls, and receive immediate feedback on their progress, with suggestions for how to implement it. These interactive features foster a communicative and

dynamic language learning environment, replicating authentic language use scenarios and enhancing language acquisition.

With all this in mind, it's essential for materials writers to adapt to the ever-changing technological landscape and learn how to write digital materials. As a digital-first content provider, the team at OtterElt gave a workshop session at this year's IATEFL conference about how to write digital materials, with a key look at how to write for self-study apps.

Why focus on self-study apps?

Language-learning self-study apps are a rapidly growing market, with more than 10 million users on the app Babbel alone, and revenue topping almost $9billion in 2022. Some other examples of these apps include Duolingo and Mondly.

Self-study apps provide learners with independence and the ability to choose their own pace of study as well as the choice of how they learn. They provide the opportunity to reinforce learning, allow for a customised learning experience, and have students learn in ways which are closer to their daily lives. Our phones are now an integral part of our everyday lives and fit into every scenario and situation we face daily. The same principle should apply to language learning: we should aim to align with the world as it is now, rather than seeing technology as 'just another thing to use'.

FEATURES OF DIGITAL MATERIALS

There are many things to consider when writing digital materials, and, more specifically, self-study apps. It is important to note that when we're referring to writing digital materials, it's simply the student-facing content, rather than the backend code.

As a teacher, you're often armed with your Teacher's Book, Student's Book and Workbook for a lesson. Self-study apps often provide only student-facing materials. With this in mind, as materials writers, we need to think about how we can replicate the instructions and guidance a teacher might give, and instead use a narrative thread to guide students from one activity to the next, at the same time setting context and activating previous knowledge. We can also include pop-up tip boxes (platform dependent), and ensure our rubrics are as clear as possible.

Consider the accessibility of the materials you're writing. For example – what screen size will these materials be available on – a phone, a tablet, a laptop or a desktop? How much information can be easily read on-screen? How much information is too much information?

Remember that the activities must meet the same learning objectives as the print materials, but with fewer items or activities. After all, a learner is unlikely to sit studying on their app for the same length of time as they would for a face-to-face lesson. Learning becomes more 'bite-sized', and therefore needs to be segmented in such a way that a student can simply leave and come back whenever they want to.

Think about what task types would work well in a self-study language learning app, but keep in mind that the activities don't necessarily need to replicate a coursebook. Writing digital materials is a great way to be creative about the tasks, depending on the capabilities of the digital platform you're writing for. With the development of Generative AI, platforms are inevitably going to progress in what they can do – watch this space!

THE OTTERELT WORKSHOP

In our IATEFL session, we worked with delegates to create our own self-study language learning app, by guiding them through the steps above.

We began by discussing self-study apps and why they're so crucial to the learning landscape. It turned out that many delegates in the room had, in fact, learnt on a language-learning app themselves, or were currently doing so!

We also discussed how self-study apps may have a different focus. For example, Duolingo uses a badging reward system to gamify learning. It prompts the user to want to level up their language learning and share what they've done with others. Other self-study apps may act as an accompaniment to a coursebook, or as a standalone product.

We then went on to elicit many wonderful suggestions for how delegates thought print materials differed from digital, and particularly the things to consider from a materials writer's perspective. We then provided some sample content to use as the basis for the session, before practising writing the narrative thread to replicate the teacher's guidance.

We then moved on to how to make the content accessible to all users. Many universal design principles were elicited and discussed. Some of the key points, among many others, were:

- considering the font, and its size
- the contrast between the writing and the background colour
- including alt text for photos
- considering the type of task and how accessible it is to a variety of processing abilities
- considering using colour to convey meaning (e.g., in grammar explanations)

We then finished the session by asking for delegates' key takeaways from the session. A recurring idea was that it was interesting to hear that digital materials don't need to be an exact copy of a coursebook, and how important the narrative thread is.

We absolutely loved giving our workshop session at IATEFL 2023 in Harrogate and can't wait to see how digital materials evolve over the next year before IATEFL 2024. We'll see you there!

Laura Broadbent *is an ELT materials writer and consultant specialising in digital and SEN materials. Before writing, she worked as a teacher in Malaysia, Brazil and Europe, and then as a textbook translator in Spain. She has worked on a wide range of digital and hardcopy resources, including student materials, apps, and video filming and editing. She also volunteers as a speech and language therapist assistant for people who have experienced a stroke, at a school for deaf students, and at the Royal Sussex Hospital.*

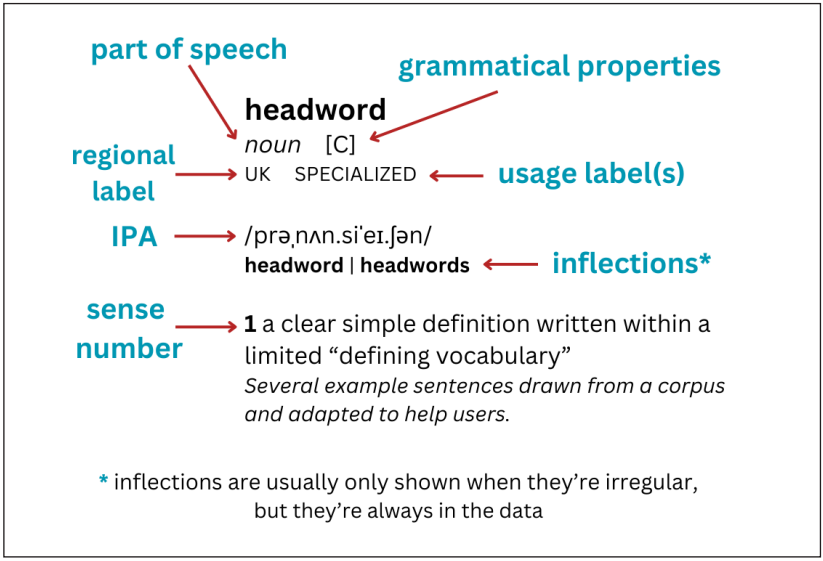
Billie Jago *is an ELT writer and teacher trainer specialising in digital learning materials and assessment resources. She has written for various publishers including Pearson, National Geographic Learning, and the British Council. Alongside materials writing, she delivers international teacher training workshops and is the founder of the ELTcpd professional development podcast.*

13

EXAMPLES, EXAMPLES: WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM A LEXICOGRAPHER?

By Julie Moore, February 2024

As a lexicographer, working on an entry for a learner's dictionary involves using a corpus to research every aspect of a word and its usage, then looking at all the information you collect to decide what's going to be most useful to the average dictionary user. Below is a summary of some of the aspects of a word that we might research:



THE ROLE OF EXAMPLE SENTENCES

Once I've pinned down all the key information at the top of an entry and then wrestled with dividing multiple meanings into numbered senses with appropriate definitions, by far the bulk of my time on most entries is spent selecting example sentences. Years of selecting and crafting examples based on corpus data has stood me in good stead for work on a variety of ELT projects beyond dictionaries.

ELT materials make extensive use of example sentences for practice activities of all kinds: gapfills, multiple choice, matching exercises, etc. In a typical coursebook, target vocabulary is first introduced in the context of a reading text. Those target items are then drawn out for extra focus in a range of activities, most of which will require appropriate example sentences:

- vocabulary practice activities in the unit itself
- revision sections after a number of units
- extra vocabulary practice at the back of the book
- vocabulary practice in a workbook
- tests to accompany the course
- extra digital practice materials.

If each target item appears, say, twice in each of these, that could mean a dozen or more sentences exemplifying the same word or phrase. As a writer, you're unlikely to work on all the components for the same course, but I've often found myself working towards the lower end of this list with the challenge of coming up with new examples to practise the same item that don't feel repetitive, without straying too far from the original target use. This is where my lexicography experience kicks in, with ideas for how I might present a word in a way that's varied and useful, but that also avoids common pitfalls.

START WIDE AND NARROW DOWN

When I'm researching a word using a corpus, I'll invariably find far more interesting aspects of a word than I can fit into a handful of examples, but it's still a useful exercise to go through. Once I've got a full picture of the word, I can set about choosing what will likely be most useful to a dictionary user. When I work on vocab activities for other types of ELT materials, I tend to employ the same approach.

VANILLA EXAMPLES

The first example in most dictionary entries will be what we call a 'vanilla' example; that is a plain, simple example that helps the user confirm that they've understood the meaning of the definition. It tries to create that lightbulb moment of recognition.

The same principle can be applied to the first example used in a coursebook vocab activity. It should be fairly simple and shouldn't stray too far from the way the word was used in the input text. At this point, the aim is to help the learner establish the basic meaning and form of the word. You don't want to confuse them by jumping to a radically different context or throwing in potentially unknown and distracting language.

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS

When I'm selecting examples, I don't want all the examples for a verb to be in the present simple, or all the instances of a noun to be countable, if it's also used uncountably. That doesn't mean you have to illustrate all possible forms. If a noun is predominantly singular, there's no need to throw in an atypical plural; however, using a variety of the most common forms in examples is good practice for the learner and provides variety.

TYPICAL OBJECTS AND CONTEXTS

One of the first things I look at is whether a word is used with or about people, objects, places, or abstract concepts. If they're all common, they should all be illustrated.

[person] ***integrate*** *yourself* ***into*** *a community*

[object] ***integrate*** *a hob* ***into*** *a kitchen unit*

[concept] ***integrate*** *an idea* ***into*** *the curriculum*

I also look at typical contexts – everyday life, business, politics, sport. We have a tendency in ELT to try and make language as 'relatable' as possible, but it's unhelpful to show a word used in a conversation between teens about their friends when in reality, it's mostly used in the context of, say, international politics. Which brings me onto …

STYLE, GENRE AND CONNOTATION

If a word is typically used in newspaper headlines, academic articles, or business communications, then examples should reflect this style. Ask yourself whether a word or phrase is usually spoken or written. Is it especially formal or informal? Is it judgmental, offensive, persuasive or literary? If students use 'marked' language in neutral contexts, they'll end up at best, sounding slightly odd and at worst, landing themselves in hot water!

COLLOCATION AND COLLIGATION

We all know how important it is to understand the company that words keep. We know that you say ***make*** *a mistake* rather than ******do*** *a mistake* (an example of collocation), and we know that you *decide* ***to do*** *something* rather than *decide ****doing*** *something* (an example of colligation). Illustrating and highlighting the most common of these patterns first helps learners recognise the combinations they're most likely to come across. But we can build on that knowledge with other combinations and possibilities as we work through subsequent examples and activities.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

There are numerous pitfalls you can fall into when selecting examples, especially if you're let loose on a corpusful of inspiration! Not least of these is getting carried away trying to show too much, getting caught up in authentic usage and straying off-target and above level.

SLIPPERY PARTS OF SPEECH

It may seem obvious to say that if you start by focusing on a verb, you should stick to verbs in subsequent examples. It's very easy to slip up, though, and some parts of speech are quite slippery. Are you using *satisfied* as the past form of a verb (*we satisfied the requirements*) or as an adjective (*a satisfied customer*)? At higher levels, you might get away with a certain degree of slippage – and it might even be useful for learners to see how flexible a vocabulary item can be – but it's something to watch out for.

PROBLEMS WITH POLYSEMY

Words in English have multiple meanings, listed as numbered senses. Sometimes those meanings are quite distinct – for example, a *table* can be a piece of furniture as well as a diagram with rows and columns. Often, they gradually transform from what we'd recognise as one meaning into something different – a *brief* for a writing project versus a legal *brief*. And then there are literal and figurative uses – *fight* a person (in a boxing match) versus *fight* an illness or *fight* a legal case. Again, these are distinctions to be aware of and use consciously where appropriate rather than slipping between them accidentally.

Who knew there could be so much behind something as apparently simple as an example sentence?! Hopefully, I've provided some food for thought next time you're looking for ideas for a 'simple' vocab activity.

Julie Moore *is a freelance ELT writer, lexicographer and corpus researcher based in Bristol.She's worked on learner's dictionaries for 25 years, in projects for all the major dictionary publishers. She also works on general ELT materials and specific vocabulary resources, such as Oxford Academic Vocabulary Practice and ETpedia Vocabulary.*

PART V: GUEST POSTS

In this last section we share two special guest posts from ***Debora Catavello****, who talks about the design of criteria to scrutinise the extent to which her EAP materials reflect the notion of authenticity.*

14

DEVELOPING A SET OF CRITERIA TO EVALUATE THE AUTHENTICITY OF EAP MATERIALS

by Debora Catavello, March 2024

The mediating role of materials writers between research and teachers/learners is an area worth investigating because teaching materials are often criticised for their misalignment with findings from relevant research. For example, Tomlinson (2022) condemns the continued popularity of the Presentation, Production and Practice (PPP) approach despite research having proven its ineffectiveness. In a recent post on this same blog, Susanna Schwab makes a similar point.

One of the language learning principles I looked at in my study is *authenticity.* The traditional, and narrow, definition of authenticity refers to the use of language input, i.e. texts, that were not intentionally created for language teaching purposes (e.g. journal articles). A broader definition of authenticity considers aspects of a task, such as the sequencing of activities and the interaction patterns. From a task-sequence perspective, for example, EAP materials are perceived as more authentic if they require students to engage with the content of a text *before* looking at its linguistic features, as content is what readers would usually focus on (McGrath, 2002). Classroom interaction patterns are also important. For example, authentic EAP materials should encourage students to work collaboratively and independently

from the class tutor, as this is how students are expected to work on their degree programmes (De Chazal, 2014).

So, authenticity is an important aspect of not only the *language input* but also the *task*, *context* and *purpose* of learning activities (Jordan, 1997; Tomlinson, 2010). Central to this principle is the idea that students should be framed as language *users,* rather than language *learners,* who are working on tasks that have meaning-based objectives (Ellis, 2003). It is this broader conceptualisation of authenticity I was keen to investigate in my exploratory study.

The set of materials (nine worksheets) I analysed in my study are my own, so mine is also a reflective account. The materials were those I designed for an academic language and literacy course offered to students on the International Foundation Programme (IFP) at the University of Bristol.

My main research question was: 'To what extent are the materials I design informed by the principle of authenticity?' To answer this question, I first sought to determine a set of criteria (Table 1), drawing on the work of Littlejohn (2022). This set of criteria is something I am still working on, and I would welcome your suggestions. (Feel free to comment on this below!)

Materials writers' criteria
Section: Authenticity

Language input	What is the source of the input?	☐ Previous Learner (exemplars) ☐ Published material (expert) ☐ Published material (adapted)
	How long is the input?	☐ Words ☐ Sentences ☐ Paragraphs ☐ Extended discourse
	What is the topic of the input?	e.g. night safety in Bristol, transitioning to university …
	What is the target genre/ sub-genre?	Questionnaires, research articles, introductions, methodology sections, results sections, marking criteria …
	What mode is the input in?	☐ Linguistic (written) ☐ Linguistic (spoken) ☐ Visual ☐ Aural

Task	What is the nature of the response solicited from the student?	☐ Personal to learner / opinions ☐ General knowledge ☐ Academic knowledge
	What is the student doing?	Answering questions, matching, re-ordering, brainstorming, …
	How are the activities sequenced?	☐ PPP ☐ TTT ☐ TBL
	How are students interacting?	☐ Individual ☐ Pair ☐ Group ☐ Whole class

Table 1 Section on authenticity in the materials writers' criteria

With these criteria, I was trying to capture what makes teaching materials authentic. So, the section on language input draws on the idea that input should be *meaningful*, whether this might mean topics likely to interest students and/or genres and modes relevant to their needs (Hedge, 2000). I also included *source* and *length* because I thought this type of data could yield some interesting information in relation to the perhaps narrowest conceptualisation of authenticity as 'the use of texts not intentionally created for language teaching purposes'. The *task* section in my set of criteria is an attempt to go beyond the narrow definition of authenticity and investigate the broader conceptualisation of authenticity I mentioned earlier in this blog post.

I believe that using these criteria to reflect on the materials I design proved useful in identifying how I could make them more authentic. For a start, the data analysis revealed that the majority of the language input in my materials was sourced from assignments written by previous

students. The quality of these samples varied from high-scoring samples to less successful ones. I didn't make any changes to the original student samples (in this sense, they were indeed authentic). This is a fairly popular approach in EAP, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, authentic texts such as research articles tend to be perceived as too long and difficult for EAP learners, especially pre-undergraduates. Secondly, they encourage students to be teachers, so to speak. For example, when looking at student exemplars in class, learners are encouraged to identify both strengths and areas for development, which involves using their judgement. When the EAP tutor analyses these samples with the learners, what the tutor is doing is essentially demystifying what good academic writing is or, using Smyth & Carless's (2021) words, they make what would otherwise remain 'tacit knowledge' visible to students. The ability to judge a draft is invaluable for university students, who often do not get feedback on their drafts.

This approach, however, has recently come under criticism. The use of student exemplars seems to exacerbate the mismatch between the texts students read and have access to and what they are asked to produce: the so-called 'genre paradox' (Walková, 2023). Students usually have access to published papers written by expert writers, and these are what they read for their assignments. Students do not have access to a sufficiently large bank of student samples, and this prevents the development of formal schemata for which frequent exposure is necessary. An additional issue is that students are often not encouraged to engage with the content of student exemplars. This issue also transpired in my study: even when the topics of the exemplars in my materials were *authentic* in the sense that they were potentially interesting or relevant to students (e.g., night safety in Bristol, transitioning to university, gender and students' choices in my study), the activities in the worksheets did not ask students to share a personal response or engage with the content. Table 2 provides a sample of the questions used in some of these activities. As you can see, the focus is on reading strategies and textual features of the text. The fact that these materials do not encourage a personal response in learners might impact the extent to which they perceive the content of the lesson as interesting and informative (McGrath, 2002).

1.1 Read the following extract from a published research paper on students' perceptions of academic integrity and discuss: 1 What are the research questions? 2 What content do you expect to find in the Results section of this paper? 3 Can you guess what methods the researcher used? (Worksheet 17.2)
3.4 Read the sample below and identify the moves and sub-moves in Table 2.2. Sample 1 'How do gender stereotypes affect students' subject choices? A study among international foundation students at a UK university' (Worksheet 18.1)
3.1 Read the sample below and add examples of evaluation in the table. (Worksheet 18.2)

Table 2 Extracts from exemplar analysis

A further issue arising from the exclusive use of student exemplars is the limited length of discourse to which students are exposed. When looking at my materials using the criteria in Table 1, I started noticing that the student exemplars were only a few paragraphs long (usually because of concerns over possible intentional or unintentional plagiarism). This is somewhat problematic because linguistic features operating across extended stretches of discourse might go neglected in teaching. For example, the importance of macro-Themes and hyper-Themes in organising a long piece of text (Miller & Pessoa, 2016) might go unnoticed if students are not given access to full samples.

In addition, a focus on short stretches of discourse might fail to give students an overview of what Bruce (2015) calls 'cognitive genres'. The cognitive genre is the internal organisation of a passage that fulfils a specific purpose (e.g., to argue, explain); in contrast, 'social genres'

are 'socially recognised constructs' (ibid, p.4; e.g., an essay, a research article) and refer to the overall purpose of a text. Students analysing full samples could develop an appreciation of how a text unfolds by noticing how different sections within the same text instantiate different cognitive genres (e.g., explanation, discussion). This kind of analysis would teach students the importance of rhetorical shifting in writing assignments. (You don't *only* argue in an argumentative essay; in some parts you might *explain* or even *recount*.)

On a more positive note, the data analysis revealed my effort to ensure the authenticity of my materials by drawing on relevant research. In this sense, I was acting as a mediator between the results of research and learners/teachers. For example, the extracts in Table 3, which were taken from the teacher's notes (bolded for ease of reference) include quotes and terms from Basturkmen's (2009) move analysis of results sections (2009) and Hyland's (2005) corpus study of stance and engagement in research articles (2005). Although the linguistic analysis should ideally be carried out in-house, this 'mapping of the field' using existing secondary linguistic analysis is an important stage in designing materials (Coffin & Donohue, 2014, p. 264).

b. Does the student comment on every main result? **Note to teachers:** this question should encourage students to notice the 'Result Comment Sequence' (or its absence?) in the sample: this is shown to be a pervasive pattern in the Discussion (see Basturkmen (2009: 245): 'The bulk of the discussion comprised sequences of move 3 – Reporting a Result (or set of related results) followed by a move 4 – Commenting on (the) Result. This sequence was repeated for as many results as the writers wished to discuss. This pervasive pattern occurred across all scripts. It is referred to as the "Result Comment Sequence"' (Worksheet 18.1)
2.2 Consider each example and discuss the effect of the language choices made by the writers as well as their reasons for making such choices. **Note to teachers/STEM students regarding Self-mention:** 'In the sciences it is common for writers to downplay their personal role to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of research activities, and the generality of the findings, subordinating their own voice to that of unmediated nature … In the humanities and social sciences, in contrast, the use of the first person is closely related to the desire to both strongly identify oneself with a particular argument and to gain credit for an individual perspective.' At this point, tell students there's another way they can include evaluation. They can interact with the reader. The focus here is on engagement (see Hyland, 2005), but this term does not need to be used with students unless teachers feel otherwise. (Worksheet 18.2)

Table 3 Extracts from teacher's notes

On reflection, this exploratory study has prompted a revision of my current approach to designing materials. Although the student exemplars analysed in my study can be considered authentic in that their genre and topics are relevant to the majority of IFP students, the accompanying activities could be made more authentic in a number of ways.

First, more authenticity could be achieved by ensuring that the materials adopt an *emergent* approach (De Chazal, 2014, p. 275) to the study of language, where texts are central to the course, and students are encouraged to first engage with the content and then notice relevant linguistic choices.

The initial focus on content should also include a discussion of *purpose* and *context* to acknowledge the EAP genre paradox mentioned above. And this is why in my materials I would like to include more of the kind of contrastive analysis that features in Coffin and Donohue's (2014) 'language as a social-semiotic' (LASS) approach. This type of analysis always starts by asking students three seemingly simple questions (Figure 1) that aim to clarify the relationships between *purpose* and *context*, on the one hand, and *stages*, *language* and *interpersonal relations* on the other, while also prompting a reflection on alternative ways of writing.

Why don't they all write the same?

The activity starts looking at how writing is different. That is, writing is not one thing. It is different things in different situations. There are different genres of writing. In the activity, there are three pieces of writing which seem more or less the same. The activity explores how they are different.

The real purpose of doing this is to lead into thinking about how writing for Ways of Seeing is different from (and the same as) other writing you may have done.

There are three pieces of writing (i.e. texts). For each one you are going to consider three questions:

1. Why is this being written about?
2. How is this being written about?
3. What other ways of writing about it are there?

Question 1 deals with purpose and context.

Question 2 deals with stages, language, and interpersonal relations.

Question 3 compares three texts.

Figure 1 sample of teaching materials (Coffin & Donohue, 2014, p. 130)

This focus on alternatives is then explored in Question 3 from the perspective of appropriateness to student assignments (Figure 2). Thus, Coffin and Donohue's materials seem to go some way towards acknowledging the EAP genre paradox and helping students navigate the complexities of academic writing.

3. What other ways of writing about it are there?

This question focuses on the differences between texts.

Go back to the list of purposes in question 1.

Are any of these purposes appropriate to a university assignment?

Go back to the subject expression in question 2.

Tick any of these expressions which are appropriate to a university assignment and cross any which are not.

Why do you think so?

Go back to the relationship expressions in question 2.

Do they signal a relationship between a student and a teacher?

Why/why not?

Figure 2 Sample of teaching materials (Coffin & Donohue, 2014, p. 133)

Do your materials feature student exemplars too? What is your solution to the EAP genre paradox? I'd love to hear from fellow materials writers, so please leave your comments below!

References

- Bruce, I. (2015). Use of cognitive genres as textual norms in academic English prose: University essays in English literature and sociology. Bulletin VALS-ASLA, n° spécial, tome 2, 161–175.
- Coffin, C. & Donohue, J. (2014). A language as social semiotic-based approach to teaching and learning in higher education. Wiley.

- De Chazal, E. (2014). English for academic purposes. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). Task-based language learning and teaching. Oxford University Press.
- Hedge, T. (2020). Teaching and learning in the language classroom. Oxford University Press.
- Jordan, R. R. (1997). English for academic purposes: A guide and resource book for teachers. Cambridge University Press.
- Littlejohn, A., (2022). The analysis and evaluation of language teaching materials. In J. Norton, & H. Buchanan, (Eds.). The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teaching, pp.263–276. Routledge.
- McGrath, I. (2002). Materials evaluation and design for language teaching (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Miller, R. T. & Pessoa, S. (2016). Where's your thesis statement and what happened to your topic sentences? Identifying organizational challenges in undergraduate student argumentative writing. TESOL Journal, 7(4), 847–873.
- Smyth, P., & Carless, D. (2021). Theorising how teachers manage the use of exemplars: Towards mediated learning from exemplars. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 46(3), 393–406.
- Timmis, I. (2022). Theory and practice in materials development. In J. Norton, & H. Buchanan, (Eds.). The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teaching, pp. 30–46. Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B. (2022). The discipline of materials development. In J. Norton, & H. Buchanan, (Eds.). The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teaching, pp. 3–16. Routledge.

- Walková, M. (2023). EAP genre paradox [PowerPoint presentation]. BALEAP Conference: Caution! EAP under deconstruction, 19–21 April, Warwick.

Debora Catavello *is an English for Academic Purposes tutor at the University of Bristol. Her main research areas include academic writing, materials writing, corpus linguistics and feedback practices. Her latest article, 'Exploring teachers' beliefs and practices associated with written feedback on English for Academic Purposes student writing' (The Language Scholar, 2023), explores the view of teachers who conceptualise feedback as a contextualised and dialogic practice. Debora can be contacted at* debora.catavello@bristol.ac.uk

EDINBURGH PRE-CONFERENCE EVENT 2025

Come and join us in Edinburgh on 7 April 2025 for our pre-conference event! We've got an exciting line-up of talks and workshops to mark eleven years of MaWSIG:

Sandy Millin:
What does it mean to be an effective materials writer?

Jennifer Murray:
Writing for online readers: Tips and tools for materials writers

Rhona Snelling:
The juggle is real: Balancing the contradictions of materials writing

Christina de la Mare:
Fiction readers: How to find your story arc

Ciarán Lynch:
AI-mazing materials: rom prompt to published in 15 minutes

MaWSIG
Materials Writing Special Interest Group

CAMBRIDGE