

Training Teachers to be Materials Writers

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the content and processes involved in the training of materials writers, and specifically of writers of English language textbooks. It draws on the author's experience as a consultant to a number of national textbook projects and it makes the case for training local authors to write for their own context rather than relying on books written for wide international use. This case is premised on the beliefs that each country needs to build authoring capacity, and that teachers and learners are best served by materials that take into account local culture, school realities and mother tongue interference problems.

Keywords: materials; textbook; local; global; project; training; content; process

The three-way relationship between teachers, learners and teaching materials is complex, often characterized by affective as well as cognitive perspectives. I have previously described it as 'the eternal triangle' (Bolitho, 1990). While language teachers generally rely on published textbooks as tools of their trade, most find at some point in their work that their textbook falls short of their learners' needs or of their own expectations. This leads inevitably to dissatisfaction and complaints, but in many cases also to a decision to supplement or adapt the textbook, or even to replace it with material targeted directly at the learners the teacher works with on a regular basis. This is how I started out as a materials writer, and I suspect that the same is true of many in our profession. Of course, these early attempts at writing are usually experimental in nature, and the materials produced this way may be amateurish and not always successful. But a bridge has been crossed,