



ESL MiniConference

The Role of Textbooks in the ESOL Classroom Valerie Whiteson Extends on Recent TESL-L Discussion

I have taught ESOL in the UK, the US, and Israel to students from elementary school to university and my Ph.D. is in English Education from Indiana University.

Although methods, fashions, etc. change, the one constant in my career is that I was always assigned a textbook. Naturally, after a while I made changes to it. Later, if I couldn't find a suitable textbook, I produced one. I've written 11 books published in different countries.

I have never taken a teaching practicum and so the concept of a lesson plan is foreign to me. In a discussion on TESL_L, teachers who go into a class without a lesson plan are often accused of 'winging it'. When I go into the classroom, I know that we are going to study something in English such as a poem, story, song, play games, write an essay, etc. Grammar is always studied in context. Vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation are never isolated but part of the whole. By not having a lesson plan, the teacher can deal with whatever comes up in the lesson. 'Lesson plans' and 'responding to students' individual needs' are seen to be contradictory notions by some teachers.

In the discussion on TESL-L, I was astonished to hear some teachers were encouraged by their professors to develop their own teaching materials. "Nobody knows your students better than you," they were told. One wonders if teachers of other subjects such as arithmetic, history, etc. are also expected to produce their own materials.

Requiring new teachers to produce teaching materials is asking them to reinvent the wheel. Learners of English have much in common in the ways they acquire English as research has shown. There are wonderful ESOL textbooks out there. We recently published a book with Cambridge University Press, which is not selling too well. When I asked the sales people why, I was told "It's an excellent book and most teachers who see it order one." It doesn't take a detective to know that most teachers simply don't have the know how to produce materials, plan lessons, check homework, etc. and so they help themselves to published teaching

Summer
2006

Review of
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Valerie
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Remembering
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Why I Write
Lesson Plans

The Role of
Textbooks in
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Lexical, and
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materials and who can blame them?

A good textbook exposes learners to the language and allows them to activate their LADs (language acquisition devices) thus helping them to acquire English as efficiently as possible. Because we all have such different learning styles, exposure to the language will lead to different kinds of acquisition.

Most textbooks go through many hands and many revisions before they enter a classroom. Publishers make sure that the materials they want to sell are current and suited to the populations they are meant for. Where did this antipathy to textbooks come from?

Textbooks by Valerie Whiteson:



THE PLAY'S THE THING, by Valerie Whiteson and Nava Horovitz. Cambridge University Press (1998)
sales@Cambridge.org



VIEWS & VOICES: Writers of English Around the World, by Valerie Whiteson and Françoise Beniston. Alta Book Center Publishers (2003) <http://www.altaesl.com/>

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