



folio

Journal of the Materials Development Association

MATSDA

In this issue:

**Alan Maley**

'More Research is Needed' – A mantra too far?

**Linh Phung**

Facilitating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) through Web-based Activities: A Teacher's reflection

**Catarina Castro**

The Philosophy Underlying the use of L2 Textbooks in a University Context

**Zheng, Xiaohong & Zhou, Yan**

On Foreign Cultural Content in English Textbooks: A case study of the textbooks used in Chinese Junior Middle Schools: *Go for it*

**Paul Benjamin**

The Culture of the Classroom: A framework for developing culturally appropriate materials for Arab learners

**David Brennan**

Book Review: Creativity in the English Language Classroom



# The MATSDA/University of Liverpool 2016 Conference

## Authenticity and L2 Materials Development

June 18th-19th, 2016

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### Plenary Speakers

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*Gail Ellis   Rod Ellis   Alan Maley   Hitomi Masuhara*  
*Freda Mishan   Julie Moore   Ivor Timmis   Brian Tomlinson*

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### Venue

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South Campus, University of Liverpool

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### Times

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Registration: 08.30 on June 18th and 19th  
Conference: 09.00-18.00 on June 18; 09.00-17.00 on June 19th

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### Fees

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(to include lunch and coffee)  
Students: £85 (£50 for one day)  
MATSDA members: £125 (£75 for one day)  
Non-members: £150 (£90 for one day)

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### MATSDA Membership

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Contact Susie Pearson at [matsdamembershipsec@nile-elt.com](mailto:matsdamembershipsec@nile-elt.com)

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### Registration, Accommodation and Payment

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<http://www.matsda.org/events.html>  
<http://www.liv.ac.uk/english/our-events/matsdajune2016/>  
<http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/matsda-2016-university-of-liverpool-conference-registration-19945725201>  
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### Offers of Papers

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To offer a paper for a forty minute presentation or to offer a poster presentation,  
please contact: Brian Tomlinson: [brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com](mailto:brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com)

**SEE YOU IN LIVERPOOL IN JUNE 2016**

# Contents

Editorial, Freda Mishan .....	2
Greetings from the President .....	3
<i>Brian Tomlinson, MATSDA President</i>	
'More Research is Needed' - A mantra too far? .....	4
<i>Alan Maley</i>	
Facilitating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) through Web-based Activities: A Teacher's reflection .....	12
<i>Linh Phung</i>	
The Philosophy Underlying the use of L2 Textbooks in a University Context.....	18
<i>Catarina Castro</i>	
On Foreign Cultural Content in English Textbooks: A case study of the textbook used in Chinese Junior Middle Schools: <i>Go For It</i> .....	24
<i>Zheng, Xiaohong &amp; Zhou, Yan</i>	
The Culture of the Classroom: A framework for developing culturally appropriate materials for Arab learners .....	34
<i>Paul Benjamin</i>	
Book Review: Creativity in the English Language Classroom.....	40
<i>Reviewed by David Brennan</i>	
<i>Freelance Register</i> .....	44

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[www.matsda.org](http://www.matsda.org)

## From the Editor

Freda Mishan, University of Limerick

I am delighted to be presenting MATSDA members and Folio readers with the Spring 2016 issue of the journal. Issue 17.1 contains, as they have come to expect, a stimulating collection of original and thought-provoking papers from across the globe. Starting with Alan Maley's counter-cultural 'More Research is Needed' – *A mantra too far?* challenging an environment in which, Maley argues, research into teaching threatens to overwhelm rather than enrich it. A counterpoint to this is the deeply reflective piece of action research from Linh Phung exploring CLIL teaching in a US context. One of the core concerns of MATSDA, critical coursebook evaluation, is the subject of a number of articles in this issue, with these situated in various contexts; The Middle East, China (discussing EFL coursebooks) and Germany (discussing books for MFL). We have Paul Benjamin's challenge to the conventional wisdom of how to achieve 'cultural appropriacy' in language learning materials written for Middle Eastern learners, complemented by Zhen Xiaohong and Zhou Yan's fascinating glimpse into the presentation of culture in the English language

textbooks used in Chinese Middle Schools as well as Catarina Castro's paper, in which she uncovers the pedagogical philosophy underlying modern language textbooks used in Germany. Our book review this issue, the British Council Publication *Creativity in the English Language Classroom* edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey, is fittingly written by creative writer and TESOL practitioner, David Brennan. In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the contributors to this issue and invite others to follow suit, adding to the critical mass in materials development that the journal's association, MATSDA, has been so successful in generating. Indeed, I anticipate that the MATSDA conference in Liverpool in June this year (see advertisement in this issue) will, as in other years, spark creativity and spur journal contributions.

Freda Mishan  
University of Limerick  
February 2016

## Greetings from the President

Brian Tomlinson, MATSDA President

It's been another good year for MATSDA and for publications on materials development for language learning. We've received a lot of positive comments about our conference on motivation at the University of Limerick in 2015 and we're recruiting very well for the MATSDA/University of Liverpool Conference on Authenticity in Materials Development for Language Learning on June 18th-19th (see [www.matsda.org.uk](http://www.matsda.org.uk) though, as we still have places available). This conference will be the first in which we've invited the IATEFL Materials Writing SIG (MAWSIG) to nominate a representative to give a plenary presentation. Julia Moore will be the MAWSIG representative and our other plenary speakers will be Gail Ellis, Rod Ellis, Alan Maley, Hitomi Masuhara, Freda Mishan, Ivor Timmis and Brian Tomlinson. We'll also have thirty five paper presenters from over twenty different countries.

The book driven by the MATSDA/University of Liverpool Conference in 2014 will be published in May 2016 as Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (2016) *SLA Research and Materials Development for Language Learning*. New York: Routledge, and the proceedings of the MATSDA/University of Limerick Conference in 2013 will be published soon as Masuhara, H., Mishan, F. & Tomlinson, B. (Eds.). (2016) *Practice and Theory for Materials Development in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars. In addition I've guest edited two special issues of journals which are dedicated to articles on materials development for language learning and which are contributed to by

members of the MATSDA Committee as well as by regular contributors to MATSDA conferences. They are Tomlinson, B. & Cirocki, A. (Eds.) (2015). *Materials in the ELT classroom: Development, use and evaluation. The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*, 4/2. and Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (2016). *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching (RILL)*. Special Issue on Materials Development, 10/2. Also our Folio Editor, Freda Mishan has co-edited a book on materials development (Mishan, F. & Timmis, I. (eds.). (2015) *Materials Development for TESOL*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) and another book with many contributions from MATSDA regulars has just been published (Azarnoosh, M., Zeraatpishe, M., Faravani, A. & Kargozari, H. R. (Eds.) (2016). *Issues in Materials Development*. Rotterdam: SensePublishers).

These publications (and a number of others) reflect the growing interest in materials development, both as an area of academic study and as a practical endeavour. We like to think that MATSDA has helped to stimulate this development and we aim to continue doing so through *Folio*, through our conferences, through related publications and through, we hope, a revival of the materials development workshops we used to run. We hope you'll join us.

Brian Tomlinson

President of MATSDA

# 'More Research is Needed' – A mantra too far?

Alan Maley

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

I intend to challenge the almost universal, yet largely unexamined, credo that research is of prime value in the context of language teaching and learning. I argue that research and the practice of teaching are quite different forms of activity, with no necessary connection between them. Each has its own value independently of the other. Typically research is accorded higher status than teaching. (Cook and Seidlhofer, 1995, Griffee, 1997, Kramsch 1995, Strevens, 1978). In my view this is unjustified and has potentially negative consequences for both communities. I shall then examine some of the reasons that academic research has relatively modest value for teaching and learning: the quantity and sheer inaccessibility of data, the relative lack of its real relevance for teaching, the paucity of useful results despite massive investment of time, effort and money, the triviality of much 'research', especially when carried out as a higher degree requirement, the difficulty of conducting reliable research, the fact that even helpful research findings are routinely ignored, and the fact that most advances and new ideas within language pedagogy do not have their origins in research anyway.

One of the justifications often cited for research, especially action research, is its value as a vehicle for teacher development. I argue that this is only occasionally the case and that there are perhaps more effective and less expensive ways of helping teachers develop professionally. Finally, I offer an alternative approach which puts *inquiry* at the centre of pedagogy, without the need for elaborate and costly schemes of research and without the unequal relationship which currently obtains (Cook & Seidlhofer, 1995, Griffee, 1997, McDonough, 1990, Maley, 2003).

## Research and teaching/learning are different

The research and the teaching discourse communities are completely different in their philosophy, their aims and their procedures (Ur, 2014).

The aim of research is to establish the facts and to winnow the truth from them by the testing of hypotheses. This involves intensive and deep thinking in deciding which problems to select and how best to investigate them. It is a deliberate and rational mode of thinking (Kahneman, 2013). It is future-oriented, with a view to establishing what is 'true' before actually dealing with it at some later time. No immediate change is envisaged. It is less concerned with action than with investigation, analysis and discussion.

Teaching deals with real-time action in the immediate present. Planning a lesson is vastly different from the flesh-and-blood encounter which actually takes place in the classroom (Underhill, 2014, Underhill and Maley, 2012). The immediate and unpredictable needs which arise require teachers to make split-second decisions. Kahneman (2014) calls this *i*-thinking, which depends on an intuitive mode. Teachers have to deal with immediate change and have to focus on surviving daily with their self-esteem intact after the often bruising realities of the classroom.

Researchers are generally evaluated on the quantity and quality of their publications, and the influence they have on their field. They are assessed internally by the confederacy of their peers. Teachers are generally externally evaluated by their superiors or sponsors in terms of the results they obtain with their students. They are also frequently evaluated implicitly for their effectiveness and personal qualities by the students themselves. Some studies cast doubt on the issue of research and its relevance for teachers. (Bolitho 1987,

Borg, 2003, 2009; Ellis, 2010, 2012; Nassaji, 2012).

Researchers enjoy professional esteem not commonly extended to teachers. They also have somewhat more favourable working conditions than most teachers, in terms of salary, promotion prospects, working hours, access to publication and availability of time.

It is clear, therefore, that the two discourse communities are radically different from each other. Both engage in legitimate and valuable activities. What is not legitimate is for one of them (research) to claim ascendancy over the other (teaching).

## Why research is not the answer for teachers

To be useful to teachers, research would need to meet the following minimal criteria: relevance to their immediate concerns, reliability, generalizability, accessibility, and applicability. Academic research rarely meets these criteria.

### Irrelevance:

Much research is irrelevant to teachers' immediate concerns with helping students learn more effectively. Instead, much research seems to focus on relatively trivial minutiae, or on proving facts which would be obvious even to an uninformed observer.

### Not readily generalizable:

Research is rarely generalizable, given the specificity of contexts investigated and the small sample sizes. Many studies are based on a handful of subjects in university settings, whereas most teaching situations involve larger numbers of younger learners. These small sample sizes make findings non-significant statistically. Paradoxically, the more specific a study is (and therefore more reliable), the less generalizable it is to other contexts (and thus less valid).

### Inaccessible:

Most important perhaps is the inaccessibility of research findings. Even full-time researchers do not have the time or energy to trawl through the quantity of information now available and to evaluate its usefulness, still less teachers. Research information is also not easy to find. It is usually published in specialist journals, books and websites not readily accessible by teachers. It is moreover, often written in a style which is impenetrable for the common reader. Academic discourse is often abstruse and inaccessible to readers from outside the academic discourse community, simply because it is not written for the common reader (or the teachers); it is written for other researchers. Researchers communicate with other researchers, and this is quite normal.

## Not applicable:

Needless to say, if research studies are inaccessible, they are most unlikely to be applicable. We cannot apply what we are not aware of or do not understand. Penny Ur (2014) has suggested that experienced teachers might act as mediators between the research literature and practising teachers. Some applied linguists have tried to do this, (Littlewood, 1984; Lightbown and Spada, 2006), and it is also achieved through conference presentations and workshops. While welcome, this is unlikely to do anything more than palliate the problem since most teachers do not even read what the mediators write either, nor do most teachers attend conferences.

## Teachers' lack of interest

Teachers cite the following for not following research: insufficient time, inaccessibility of data, curricular constraints, cultural issues, apathy and conservatism, and the perception that research is not relevant to their immediate concerns (Borg, 2003, 2009). For teachers, research remains at best one among many other factors in promoting professional development.

'... the bottom line has to be that for the ELT practitioner the main source of professional learning is classroom experience, enriched by discussion with colleagues, feedback from students, and ... through reading, conferences and courses, of which research is one important component. Research is not the primary basis of ELT knowledge for the practitioner, but it is a valuable supplement.' (Ur, 2012).

## The difficulty of carrying out useful and reliable research

Whereas in the hard sciences it is relatively easy to control the variables involved, this is far from the case with the social sciences. The large number of variables in any kind of research into human behaviour is a major problem. Clearly the dynamics of classroom interaction are extremely difficult to measure, though they are at the core of this issue (Dornyei and Murphey, 2003; Hadfield, 1992; Underhill, 2014).

There is also the difficulty of interpretation. Identical results can sometimes be construed in different ways, and reliable replication of results is always problematic. As Ellis concludes in his monumental volume, 'SLA research ...is characterised by facts, opinions, explanations, positions and perspectives that frequently exist in an uneasy state of complementarity and opposition' (Ellis 1994).

Researchers also tend to do research into what is susceptible to being researched, and in particular what is measurable. Yet it may well be that unmeasurable factors are the most significant in language teaching;

1. **Background:** A longer version of this article was submitted in response to an invitation to contribute to a book of collected papers. After initial acceptance, and several rounds of revisions, the publisher (Routledge) instructed the editor of the collection (Brian Tomlinson) to withdraw it. This was a form of academic censorship which I found unacceptable. I am grateful to Folio for their invitation to publish these views.

For a full version of the Chapter, see:

*The Teacher Trainer*, Vol 30, No1, p5. March 2016. ([www.tttjournal.co.uk](http://www.tttjournal.co.uk) – go to TTTJ Plus)

*Humanising Language Teaching*. Year 18. Issue 3. June 2016. Major article. ([www.hltmag.co.uk](http://www.hltmag.co.uk))

what Underhill (2014) calls the 'dark matter' of the classroom. Widdowson (1993) drew attention to the differences between what he calls 'objectives' and 'aims'. Objectives are time-bound, short-term, atomistic, confined to language and relatively easy to measure; and aims are life-long, holistic, extending beyond language into personal developmental growth, and almost impossible to measure. Typically, research in our field opts for objectives-related research and rarely enters the domain of aims.

Of course, all research is not the same. I would make a distinction between 'professional' research (the kind carried out by staff in universities and research institutes), and the 'pseudo-research' done by many MA and many PhD students - often more of a rite of passage than a real contribution to understanding how people learn languages or how language works. Pseudo-research exists to prove that the candidate has mastered the genre requirements of the thesis - an induction into the research community. Many theses concentrate on trivia when finding a really significant topic has become so difficult. And it is rare for such works ever to be read, least of all by 'ordinary' teachers. The reason is that they were not written to be read but simply to satisfy a requirement for a higher degree.

I would also distinguish between research on language itself and on learning language. Corpus research into the nature of natural language has proved a rich source of insights of immediate use and application to materials development. (Hoey, 2005)

And there is the notion of teacher research, to which I shall turn below.

## Some effects of the research hegemony in TESOL

In recent years, English language teaching has seen an unprecedented expansion of the importance accorded research. This is largely due to the way professional development has been linked with academic qualifications. This has brought some benefits. From a group of semi-professional or completely untrained teachers, we have moved to a cadre of teachers with near-professional status.

However, many of the MA and doctoral programmes available have limited relevance for classroom practice. Moreover, there is no demonstrable enhancement of teaching quality from the possession of a higher degree. Such degrees have very little to do with pedagogical competence, and everything to do with academic status. Such programmes encourage those who take them to think of teaching as a lower form of activity than theoretical speculation and research (Kramsch, 1995). Yet professional advancement is increasingly controlled by the need to obtain such qualifications.

More generally, universities have become viewed as institutions for carrying out research, with teaching relegated to a secondary position. This is reflected in university league tables and rankings, which are based largely on research, as measured by the number of research publications in double peer-reviewed journals, and scores on citation indexes. And rankings are inevitably linked to sources of funding.

One result of this is the pressure to publish. 'Give academics citation scores and they will churn out dreary articles for other academics (Skidelsky, 2014). An accumulation of largely unread articles and books is the outcome.

## Research findings are routinely ignored

Even when research does make useful discoveries, these are routinely ignored. A good example of this would be research into the best starting age for learning an L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Results show that, except in exceptional circumstances, there is no advantage in starting to learn an L2 in infancy. In fact, it is more effective to start around 12-14 years old. Ministries of education, private school proprietors and others nonetheless persist in introducing the L2 at younger and younger ages, acting on the widespread intuitive belief that younger is better.

Abundant research into Extensive Reading shows that, properly conducted, it is one of the best ways of acquiring, maintaining and extending L2 proficiency (Day and Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). Despite this evidence, Extensive Reading rarely occupies a central place in L2 programmes. These are but two examples of the way research results are frequently ignored.

One conclusion is that research is not valued when its results run counter to popular folk-knowledge, or is inconvenient socially, institutionally or politically.

## Where have new ideas in TESOL come from?

In reviewing the major insights and developments in TESOL over the past 50 years or so, the contribution of research is relatively small, especially in view of the vast quantities of time, effort and money expended on it. Lightbown's survey of SLA details the following list of achievements (Lightbown, 2000).

1. Adults and adolescents can 'acquire a second language'
2. The learner creates a systematic interlanguage
3. There are predictable sequences in L2 acquisition

4. Practice does not make perfect
5. Knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in communicative interaction
6. Isolated error correction is usually ineffective in changing language behaviour
7. For most adult learners, acquisition stops before the learner has attained native-like mastery of the target language
8. One cannot achieve native-like...command of a second language in one hour a day.
9. The learner's task is enormous because language is enormously complex.
10. A learner's ability to understand language in a meaningful context exceeds their ability to comprehend de-contextualised language and to produce language of comparable complexity and accuracy.'

While it is useful to have common-sense intuitions verified by research, the above list does not appear to offer radically new insights to our understanding of how we learn languages.

SLA research is not the only kind of research, of course, and there are arguably more achievements than are listed here, but given the enormous quantity of research (Ellis, 1994), the returns on investment seem exiguous.

By contrast, most of the more significant insights and changes in TESOL seem to have come from academics acting as mediators and generators of ideas (rather than as researchers), from materials writers and publishers, and from individual thinkers and practitioners.

The so-called Communicative Approach, for example, came about through the reflection and theoretical speculation of academic pundits such as Wilkins (1972), Widdowson (1978), Candlin (1981) and others. It gathered momentum, in the UK at least, through the work of course-book writers such as O'Neill (1971), Abbs and Freebairn (1983), and others working with enlightened publishers such as Cambridge University Press (du Plessis 2013). Teacher training institutes, such as Reinhardswaldschule in Germany (Candlin and Edelhoff, 1989; Edelhoff 1978, 1978-82), and new teachers' associations, such as Lingua e Nuova Didattica (LEND) in Italy were also highly influential at the national level. It was also supported by organisations such as International House, Bell, Pilgrims and Eurocentres, and through the network of English Language Officers then active with the British Council, and by BBC English by Radio and Television. Research had at most only a minor role to play.

The same is true of the surge of interest in Humanistic

approaches in the 1970's and 1980's, based partly on the ideas of psychologists like Rogers (1969) and Vygotsky (1986). Moskovitz' 'Caring and Sharing in the Language Classroom' (1991) and Stevick's 'Memory, Meaning and Method' (1976) did not have their roots in research. Propagators of the approach such as Rinvoluceri (2002) focussed on classroom applicability and its effect on teachers as people, rather than on research.

Task-Based Learning has its origins in the pragmatic classroom-focussed work of Prabhu in South India (1997). It owes its subsequent development and spread to the work of Willis (1996) and others who continue to focus on practicable ideas for the classroom. Currently popular ideas such as Dogme (Meddings and Thornbury, 2009) or Demand-high Teaching (Scrivener, 2014), also owe little or nothing to academic research. If research has a role at all it is as a post-hoc evaluation of what has been done, not as a dynamo for innovation.

## But what about Research for teacher development?

It is often claimed that research projects help teachers develop professionally. I readily concede that this is sometimes, though not invariably, the case. However, I also suggest that this is a rather wasteful and costly way of promoting teacher development. The costs of a one-year MA or a 4 year PhD in the UK are staggeringly high. The cost, taken together with the time and energy expended is considerable. There are other routes to professional development which are arguably more effective and certainly less costly. These would include:

- Learning from fellow professionals - by joining a professional association, such as IATEFL or TESOL, by engaging in what Aoki (2002) calls 'professional conversations' with colleagues on a regular basis, by taking advantage of mentoring programmes (Malderez and Bodoczky, 1999; Mann and Teng, 2012), by participating in teacher conferences and workshops, and through Twitter, Facebook and blogging.
- Learning from resources: there is a superabundance of materials, including free websites (see, for example, Stannard: <http://teachertrainingvideos.com/>, HLT Magazine: [www.hlomag.co.uk](http://www.hlomag.co.uk), British Council/BBC; [www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)), teachers' magazines with practical information, (English Teaching Professional, Modern English Teacher, English Language Teaching Journal, etc.), and through using resource books for teachers. Reading 'outside the box' is also valuable: many good ideas come from feeder fields (Maley, 2006) or from domains quite unrelated to TESOL (Maley, 2009)

- Learning from involvement in projects. This would include materials writing with colleagues (Tomlinson, 2014), in-house course development, etc.
- Learning from self-reflection, for example keeping a teaching journal. The activities proposed by Farrell (2013), which are simple and can be done alone or in collaboration with colleagues, can be hugely effective.

None of these require heavy investment in research, yet they stimulate, develop and sustain professional teacher development.

## But what about Teachers as Researchers?

The 'teacher-researcher movement', (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, Edge and Richards 1993) and many others over the past 25 years or so has sought to conflate the roles of researcher and teacher and narrow the divide between them. In this perspective, the location of research is shifted to the classroom and the events which occur there. Those undertaking research are concurrently engaged in the activity of teaching

There remain a number of problems even with this new-look research however. It remains based on the research paradigm (formulation of research questions/hypotheses, collection of data, analysis, results and conclusions), even though qualitative research is now the main focus, and there is less statistical baggage. Nonetheless, the research paradigm may not be the most effective way of developing teachers as professionals. Even though focussed on the teacher, it is normally undertaken in a wider academic context (e.g. as part of an MA, under the supervision of non-teacher academics, or as part of a wider programme of research organised by university academics or institutions). It remains largely top-down, driven by the academic research community at the top and the teachers at the bottom. It is rarely generated by teachers themselves.

If successful as a classroom researcher, the teacher is likely to migrate away from teaching and be absorbed into the academic discourse community. It is rare for researchers to migrate to teaching. The reasons are self-evident: higher prestige, fewer classroom hours, better remuneration, etc.

If unsuccessful or dissatisfied, teachers often reject the possibility of ever undertaking classroom research again – remembering the experience as over-demanding in time and effort, and as ultimately stressful and unrewarding. In other words, relatively few 'ordinary' classroom teachers are likely to engage in classroom research long-term.

## So, what is to be done? Inquiry?

Clearly, some kinds of research are more useful and comprehensible to teachers than others. However, the quantity, complexity and obscurity of much of the factors discussed above makes research intimidating for most teachers (Ur, 2016 forthcoming). The current obsession with research makes many teachers feel pressure to be involved with research, prompting feelings of loss of self-esteem and of guilt, inadequacy and incompetence. The excessive reverence for research is I believe unhealthy for both researchers and teachers. It gives researchers an erroneous sense of their significance in the language teaching arena, and can devalue the often highly creative work of teachers. Is there an alternative distribution of power and responsibilities?

I believe the attempt to include teachers in the theory-making process through classroom research has been less successful than was hoped, though the work of Allwright and Hanks (2009) and others, on 'exploratory practice' has attempted to integrate classroom research and classroom teaching. One possible reason for this relative lack of success is the insistence on the word 'research', which carries with it the intimidating baggage referred to above. If this puts teachers off, as I believe it often does, perhaps we can replace it? After all, we do want teachers to be curious about and involved in their teaching: this is part of the teacher-development process. Rather than insisting on Classroom Research, why not encourage the more modest activity of Inquiry (Maley, 2003)? Being in a constantly inquiring state of mind would be less technically demanding and theoretically threatening, yet equally valuable professionally.

One aspect of Inquiry would be how we formulate questions about our work. 'I wonder why...?', 'What would happen if...?', 'Could I find another way of doing that?' etc. To address questions such as these we do not need to undertake research projects. They can equally well be tackled by more modest and more economical means as suggested above.

## Research/Inquiry

What then distinguishes Research from Inquiry?

What are the differing reasons/justifications for carrying out Research or Inquiry? The research enterprise as a whole is still largely determined by the academic discourse community. The purpose of research is to discover truth, and to build theories based upon it. It is about pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge by offering better, more empirically-tested facts and interpretations. These will be of global reach, not confined to a narrow context. It has no need

to render account to teachers or learners.

By contrast, the main reason to pursue what I am calling Inquiry, is to solve immediate problems, or answer urgent personally-relevant questions, or simply out of curiosity. It is essentially pragmatic therefore, and necessarily local in scope. It has no ambitions to formulate theories which apply universally. Its primary commitment is to learners, and perhaps to other teachers with a similar problem or question. Rather than seeking a sense of certainty, it is tentative and provisional, attempting to find out how new information or insights can be fitted into the individual's framework of beliefs as to what is plausible and feasible for her at a given moment. Prabhu (1990) has called this the 'teacher's sense of plausibility'.

## Who?

Research is almost always conducted by outsiders to the situation, by 'them'. The researcher is typically an expert, trained (or training) in how to do research (Griffiee, 1996). Necessarily this entails a relatively impersonal relationship with the context he/she is operating in. To be too personally-involved would pollute the data. The researcher's agenda then is imposed from above on the situation being investigated.

The person doing Inquiry is necessarily an insider: 'us' or just 'me'. He/she is not an expert, except in the important sense of knowing the context from the inside. The strength of this position is that it is intensely personal: feelings are as important as facts. It works from the bottom, the lived experience of the observer/inquirer.

## How?

It is necessary for research to be finite, to have closure, however provisional. Without this, it cannot report results. 'Scientific' research is driven to measure things, ensuring that what is measured is statistically significant. It tends to have a narrow focus. Research students are constantly being enjoined to 'narrow your focus' (Szesztay, 2003). They must somehow ring-fence the phenomenon they wish to study, otherwise too many variables may pollute results. However, as Greenfield points out, 'Facts on their own are not enough! While collecting information is gathering dots, knowledge is joining them up' (Greenfield, 2014, p250).

The narrowing vision of much research does not do justice to the complexity of experience. Knowing more and more about less and less is no way to approach the infinite complexity of teaching and learning.

This 'scientific' approach also has a paradoxical result as I have pointed out above. The more carefully the research controls for variables, the less likely it is that

the context will be replicated elsewhere. The more unique it is, the less generalisable it becomes. This seems like a serious defect in the paradigm.

By contrast, Inquiry is open-ended and continuing. Everything is necessarily provisional as the teacher-inquirer moves between different classes and situations, and confronts new problems. It focuses on holistic understanding. As Margit Szesztay (2003) puts it, 'I wanted to arrive at the kind of knowledge which allows me to understand the "interconnectedness" of the various aspects of facilitating discussions'. Inquiry is particularised since everyone who undertakes it does so in their own personal and social context, so it is necessarily integrated into the whole of their experience. There is little or no concern with measuring things in a scientific way. The focus is rather on noticing things, and connecting them: an intuitive process. This slow piecing together of understandings is incremental: a series of small steps with no ambition to make a major impact on the field at large. It is a modest, feasible undertaking.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have set out arguments against the current pre-eminence of research as a source of knowledge within the TESOL domain. The Research community and the Teaching community are fundamentally different enterprises, and have no necessary connection or hierarchical relationship. There is certainly no case for research to be considered a higher form of activity given its relatively modest contribution to teaching.

I have also suggested that teacher research may not be the most appropriate form of professional development. (I do not, of course, suggest teachers should never undertake research.) Generally, research and theorising, which are the province of a quite different discourse community, tend to intimidate teachers, who in any case frequently find them of limited relevance to their own professional concerns.

My proposal is therefore that we recognise the value and legitimacy of research and theory-building within its own domain. But we should not expect it to have any necessary or close link with the activity of teaching.

Likewise I propose that we valorise the activity of informal, personal inquiry into teaching by teachers, and relieve them of the pressure to engage in research. I believe we may be burdening them with the need to prove themselves in others' terms, rather than in their own. Classroom research is not the only valid way of knowing. Let us take pride in our competence as inquiring teachers, rather than pretending to be something we are not.

To those who might criticise my views as being no more than assertions unsupported by empirical research, I would ask where the empirical evidence is to be found which supports the view of research as an essential contributor to more effective language learning? If large-scale studies conclusively proving the effectiveness of research for teaching have been conducted, I have missed them. Furthermore my views reflect what many teachers in many different countries have frequently reported to me.

My paper is not however an attack on researchers or on research per se. It aims to highlight the problematic relationship between the research community and the teaching community and to offer ways of improving it. I respect many researchers for the work they are doing and am aware that some make no claim to have made a significant contribution to language teaching.

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# Facilitating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) through Web-based Activities: A Teacher's reflection

Linh Phung

## Introduction

A common process of course development involves different stages, including needs analysis, goal setting, content selection and sequencing, assessment, and evaluation. While needs analysis, goal setting, and assessment tend to be carefully considered in an ESL/EFL course development project, content selection and sequencing may not be given enough consideration. Especially when a text book is adopted for a course, it has been observed that teachers tend to forget what they know about second language learning and teaching and mostly cover the content in the book without enough critical contemplation and reflection. Therefore, in course development and implementation, it is important for teachers to thoughtfully consider the materials and activities they use, the principles behind the choice of materials, and how the materials affect students' engagement and learning. This paper will provide examples of the considerations I made when I developed and taught a new ESL course with a focus on the development of several web-based activities. In various sections of the paper, I describe several concepts and frameworks that informed my decision-making in developing the unit. In addition, I describe the activities in the unit and the technologies used to organize those activities. Finally, I evaluate the effectiveness of the web-based activities.

## Context

I work at a university-based English language programme (often referred to as the ELP) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. The programme offers intensive English instruction at five different levels (basic, low intermediate, intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced) to non-native English speaking students. Students are placed into the appropriate level based on their score on a placement test administered before the semester starts. Each level can be completed in one 14-week semester. In addition, the programme

offers short-term customized language and culture programmes to partner institutions, which cannot send students during the programme's scheduled semesters (fall, spring, and summer). One such customized programme is a six-month language and culture programme for the university's two long-term Japanese partner institutions. The students in this programme arrive at the beginning of the fall semester in August and leave after the first half of the spring semester in February. In the fall semester, the students take four ELP courses at their appropriate level together with other students in the programme. In the spring semester, because the students have to leave the programme in the middle of the semester, they study together in a customized programme. They participate in four seven-week long courses. In this paper, I describe a unit of materials in a seven-week course that I taught to a group of 11 Japanese students in the six-month language and culture programme described above.

With an interest in language and culture myself, in preparation for the course, I anticipated that my students would be interested in reading academic texts on the topic. I envisioned that they would be able to talk about culture using such terms as low context, high context, power distance, identity, communication styles, and so on. In short, I wanted them to read academic texts, learn some technical concepts in intercultural communication, use those concepts to reflect on their intercultural experiences, and improve their linguistic competence while doing those things. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) provided a framework that promised to help me to achieve those teaching goals. In addition, I wanted the students to engage in the learning process interactively and collaboratively both inside and outside the classroom. Web-based technologies were employed to enable me to engage the learners in those ways. Also, the concept 'collaborative dialogue' provided me with information on conditions facilitative to language learning. Finally, a materials development framework introduced by Tomlinson (2003a) helped

guide me through the process of developing materials and activities for the course. The next sections of the paper describe how these concepts, frameworks, and technologies informed the development and implementation of a unit of materials in the course.

## CLIL

As the term suggests, Content and Language Integrated Learning is an educational approach with a dual focus on language and content (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010). According to the authors, the term was adopted in 1994 within the European context to describe and further design good practice in schools where teaching and learning take place in an additional language. CLIL may appear similar to other approaches, such as content-based instruction, immersion education, and bilingual education. However, according to Coyle et al., what separates CLIL from those approaches is 'the planned pedagogic integration of contextualized content, cognition, communication, and culture into the teaching and learning practice' (p. 45). This integration, as illustrated by the 4Cs Framework explained in Coyle et. al, is what drew me to CLIL. In this framework, the 4Cs stand for communication, content, cognition, and culture. In simple terms, content refers to the subject matter; communication refers to language learning and use and is used interchangeably with language; cognition refers to learning and thinking processes; and culture refers to the goal of developing intercultural understanding in language education. In addition, all decisions regarding those components are within specific contexts with specific learner needs, curricular goals, and resources.

The 4Cs were considered in the development of the unit of materials in focus in this paper. Regarding the content, the materials would cover different types of social identities (gender identity, sexual identity, age identity, racial identity, and ethnic identity) and related issues (stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination). Regarding cognition, learners would need to define concepts, give examples to further explain the concepts, and use the concepts to better understand issues presented in the readings as well as interpret their experiences.

In terms of communication, to determine the language focus for the unit, the Language Triptych in Coyle et al. (2010) provided me with a useful analytical tool. According to the authors, language *of* learning is language needed for learners to access basic concepts and skills relating to the subject theme or topic. In this case, the materials would need to facilitate the learning of concepts in intercultural communication. Language *for* learning focuses on the kind of language needed to operate in a foreign language environment (strategies to work in pairs or in groups, to discuss ideas, to ask questions, etc.). In my unit, I planned

to instruct the learners on how to work in groups. Language *through* learning has to do with capturing language as it is needed by individual learners during the learning process (ibid.). For example, learners may need assistance with language to articulate their understanding. Also, certain new language and skills emerge as learners use language in the learning process. Recognizing learners' needs and their emerging language and skills, the teacher can develop or tailor the materials to address needs and reinforce emerging abilities. Many activities in my course were developed based on the learners' emerging needs. Regarding the remaining C in the framework, i.e. culture, the materials in the current unit would aim to develop learners' self-awareness in intercultural communication and understanding and appreciation of diversity and differences.

## A framework for materials development

In various books on materials development and materials evaluation by Tomlinson, (2003a; 2003b; 2011), the author urges materials developers and evaluators to follow a coherent and principled framework to guide their work. This framework requires materials developers and evaluators to review the current knowledge accumulated through empirical research in the field of language learning and teaching, reflect on their own beliefs on language learning and teaching, articulate those beliefs, and turn them into criteria to guide the materials development and evaluation process. The framework also defines materials in a broad sense to include any language input that learners are exposed to and any learning activities that they engage in. While I had taken numerous courses on language learning and teaching and have taught EFL and ESL for many years, I had never explicitly articulated beliefs and principles that were specific and measurable enough to be used as criteria for materials development. The process of articulating my beliefs and writing the criteria for materials development was useful for me to review and reflect on various concepts and frameworks in second language learning and teaching that had likely influenced my pedagogical decisions. These concepts included input, output, interaction, cognition, noticing, feedback, learner motivation, engagement, meaning, and form. I followed the process and came up with 20 'universal criteria', which were defined by Tomlinson (2003a) to be those that should be used for any materials development projects. These criteria were influenced by Tomlinson's (2003a) list of criteria but were also ones I strongly believed in. I also came up with local criteria that reflect my specific knowledge of the particular context and learners. Below are some examples of universal criteria adopted from Tomlinson (2003a) that I used.

1. To what extent are the materials likely to provide learners exposure to comprehensible language input?
2. To what extent are the materials likely to engage learners affectively?
3. To what extent are the materials likely to engage learners cognitively?
4. To what extent are the materials likely to provide learners opportunities to respond personally to the content of the input?

Below are the five local criteria I used.

1. To what extent are the materials likely to help learners to gain a better understanding of U.S. culture?
2. To what extent are the materials likely to encourage learners to connect their experience living in the U.S. with the materials?
3. To what extent are the materials likely to encourage learners to reflect on their own cultural values?
4. To what extent are the materials likely to encourage interactions outside the classroom?
5. To what extent are the materials likely to help learners to support each other in understanding challenging content of the course?

## Collaborative dialogue and online technologies

Apart from beliefs that have been transformed into specific criteria for materials development, I have been fascinated by the concept 'collaborative dialogue' (Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller, 2002) with collaborative dialogue being defined as 'dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building' (Swain, 2000, p. 102). Swain, citing Wells (1999), elaborates on the concept of collaborative dialogue by explaining that an utterance can be looked at simultaneously as process and product: as 'saying' and as 'what is said'. To be specific, by 'saying', the speaker is engaged in the cognitive act of making meaning. Once he or she has spoken, the utterance becomes an object for further exploration by the speaker and others, a process through which content and linguistic knowledge are co-constructed.

Therefore, to facilitate learners' comprehension of language input, mastery of content knowledge, and increased control of the target language, I wanted my materials to encourage my students to articulate their understanding as well as interact and collaborate to co-construct their content and language knowledge. With the availability of online technologies such as

discussion forums, text chat, and online glossary, learner-learner interaction and collaboration can be done inside as well as outside the classroom, face-to-face as well as online.

These technologies not only extend learner-learner interaction and collaboration beyond the physical classroom walls, but also have the potential to mitigate the constraints of the classroom setting, such as teacher domination and linguistic anxiety among shy students. In addition, computer-mediated communication has been documented in the CALL literature as providing learners more time to plan and monitor their output and producing more complex language (Levy and Stockwell, 2006; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996). Also, the more permanent nature of written language in those media potentially allows the learners to review their language as a 'product' and the teacher to analyze the learners' emerging skills and needs.

In short, in the classroom as well as online, I wanted my students to:

- help one another to understand the content of the reading through collaborative dialogue
- be able to communicate complicated ideas in the content area
- produce more language and more complex language
- collaborate to learn new language items through both classroom and online work.

## Online technologies

In the course I tried different technologies including synchronous text chat, discussion forum, online glossary, and interactive vocabulary games on Quizlet, which will be briefly described below.

Synchronous text chat allows two or more people to 'talk' to one another by typing into a common window in real time. Using an email account such as Gmail or Yahoo or a Facebook account, users can chat with other contacts on their contact list when online at the same time. The course management system at Chatham University, Moodle, has this feature allowing the setup of a chat room, which students can enter to talk with one another.

Unlike synchronous text chat, communication in a discussion forum is asynchronous. In a discussion forum, a thread of exchanges is initiated when somebody starts a post and others reply to the post and to other participants' posts in their own time.

Moodle also allows teachers to set up an online glossary, where teachers and students can create dictionary-like entries by entering a concept, a definition or definitions, and examples for the concept. The entries can be searched or browsed alphabetically and by the author.

Quizlet is a website where teachers and students can create sets of words with definitions and/ or examples. Based on the sets, Quizlet will create flashcards, games, and tests for students to study the sets.

I tried those tools because of their potential to encourage learner interaction, collaboration, and contribution. Based on students' participation and feedback, of those tools, activities on the discussion forum and the online glossary were the most successful in the course. The next sections describe the unit of materials on the topic of identity and intercultural communication with the focus on web-based activities and my evaluation of the activities in terms of learners' engagement, language production, and evidence of language development.

## The unit of materials on identity and intercultural communication

The course lasted seven weeks, and consisted of four face-to-face hours and two online hours per week. The unit on identity and intercultural communication described here was taught over two of these seven weeks. The participants were 11 Japanese students. The unit objectives included objectives relating to the 4Cs framework. The materials were developed to meet the 20 universal criteria and five local criteria previously mentioned. Overall, the materials consisted of the following major activities: discussion of the concept of identity and some personal stories of identity conflicts; an academic reading on social and cultural identities; another academic reading on racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S.; students' group presentations; discussion of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination; and further readings with summaries and personal responses. Students read the assigned readings at home and discussed provided questions about the readings in groups in the chat room or discussion forum. Students also posted summaries and personal responses in the discussion forum. Each student also submitted three new words or concepts to the online glossary each week. In the face-to-face lessons, the whole class discussed some selected questions about the readings. Students also presented their understanding of the readings in groups in class. In addition, some face-to-face class time was spent on language-focused exercises, such as vocabulary exercises and games and mini-lessons on strategies for group work. An outline of the first lesson in the unit is provided in Appendix 1 as an example.

## Evaluation of web-based activities in the unit and the course

In their discussion in the chat room, although students did participate and could find the answers to the questions, there was lack of interaction. They simply

divided the questions among themselves and answered them individually. At least in my course, it was not effective for the task I set up. This suggests that synchronous text chat may not be so effective in encouraging interaction and collaboration outside the classroom. Students may not be interested in chatting about 'serious' matters.

Their discussion in the discussion forum in the unit and in the course, on the other hand, was effective in facilitating interaction and language production. Students' posts showed that they could locate relevant information from the readings, interpret them, express personal opinions, share experiences, write good summaries, and comment on one another's posts. The students' face-to-face discussion following the online discussion was fruitful and lively. The asynchronous nature and the relative interactivity of the technology were a good combination for this group of students.

Reading the students' posts on the discussion forum, I also found opportunities to capture their emerging language and skills (in other words, language *through* learning). Students needed new vocabulary to express their ideas, instruction in how to paraphrase these, and strategies for elaborating on their understanding of the content via further explanations and examples. Recognizing students' needs, I could then tailor follow-up activities to further develop those skills and language.

As previously described, the online glossary was a successful project in the course. After students submitted their entries, I commented on them and developed activities to help in the learning of the new words and concepts. The students' self-assessment of the knowledge of all the words and concepts submitted and the final exam showed they started to acquire the new words through repeated encounters in the readings and intentional vocabulary learning through the lists they generated and exercises created.

In conclusion, regarding the use of technologies, learner-learner interaction on the computer is mediated by the medium. A task designed with a particular technology needs to consider not only general principles of language learning and teaching, but also the affordances, i.e. the opportunities that the technology offers and its effect on communication, as well as its constraints; learner experience and perceptions of the technology and other factors that contribute to their task performance. The integration of technology in my course was successful only to a certain extent as success was gauged by the amount of communication, the content knowledge the students displayed, and the quality of language they produced.

## Final thoughts

As teachers, we regularly encounter new concepts and frameworks through reading, interacting with

colleagues, and attending professional development activities. In a course on language and culture, the CLIL approach helped me to determine the objectives of my materials. The concept 'collaborative dialogue' helped me to think of ways to facilitate learner-learner interaction and knowledge co-construction. A principled materials development framework helped me to crystalize my knowledge and beliefs into specific criteria that guided my selection and development of materials. Technologies provided me with specific tools for organizing activities that encouraged interaction beyond the classroom walls. Reflection on and articulation of my beliefs and principles pushed me to constantly think of how to engage learners in ways that best facilitate their content knowledge and language development. The process also helped me to grow as a reflective teacher.

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## Appendix 1: A two-hour lesson

In this unit, we are going to focus on identity and intercultural communication. We are going to discuss the concepts; categories of social and cultural identities; and stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination as related to social and cultural identities. We are going to do various readings and you will work individually and collaboratively to complete tasks related to the readings.

1. What is identity? Simply put, identity is the concept of who we are. Think about words that can describe you. Think about what groups you belong to. Complete the following sentence with as many words as possible.

I am (a) \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_

As you can see we are many different things at the same time. We are different things at different times to different people.

2. Read the following stories. While you read, imagine yourself in those situations. What do you learn about the concept identity from the excerpts?
3. Now talk in pairs. What do you feel about the authors of the stories? What would you like to say to them?
4. Now look at the stories again and think about the concept identity. How can you describe it?

### At home:

**In the chat room:** Do the assigned reading and work in groups to discuss what you have learned from the

reading and what you have found interesting. You can also talk about words, ideas, and concepts you don't quite understand. Each group may use the following questions for your discussion.

Group 1: Gender identity, sexual identity, age identity

1. Gender identify is defined as the identification with the cultural notions of masculinity and femininity and what it means to be a man or a woman. What does it mean to be a man in your culture? What does it mean to be a woman in your culture? Are there any differences in the notions of masculinity and femininity in different cultures?
2. Throughout history, are there any changes in the notion of masculinity and femininity? What are some examples?
3. Are there differences in the communication style between men and women?
4. Sexual identity is defined as one's identification with various categories of sexuality. What are those categories? What are some issues concerning sexual identity in today's society?

5. Age identity is defined as the identification with the cultural conventions of how we should act, look, and behave according to our age. What are some examples of those cultural conventions?

6. What are some differences among generations? What communication problems may arise because of the differences?

Group 2: Racial and ethnic identities

1. Racial identity is defined as one's identification with a particular racial group. What are examples of racial groups?
2. What are the arguments that refute the physiological basis for race?
3. What are some racial issues in the U.S. and/ or in other countries?
4. What is ethnic identity? What is your ethnic identity?
5. What are some issues concerning ethnic identity in the U.S. and/ or in other countries?

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# The Philosophy Underlying the use of L2 Textbooks in a University Context

Catarina Castro

## Outline

This article presents some conclusions of a study that analysed eight entry level textbooks, adopted for the teaching of four Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian) in a German university context; *Freie Universität Berlin*. Following Littlejohn's (1998, 2011) framework for analysing materials, we highlight the way the principles of textbook development are reflected in the adopted approach, as well as the role they assign to the student, to the teacher, and to the textbook itself in the learning process.

## Introduction

Given the importance that didactic materials (i.e. textual material selected and explored for educational purposes) play in the process of learning a second language (i.e. any other language a speaker has acquired after his/her mother tongue), it is quite surprising that the development of this type of materials was only recognised as a relevant area of research in the 1990s (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 144). By now the development of didactic materials has ceased to be focused primarily on establishing evaluation, selection and design criteria and has become a field of research whose main goal is to understand more deeply the way these materials can promote second language (L2) acquisition.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the information available about how language materials writers go about writing their materials did not allow us to understand if this process was based on an analysis of needs, criteria sustained on principles, or on any kind of planning. Currently, however, as a result of many studies developed in this area (e.g. Byrd, 1995, 2001; Tomlinson, 1995, 1998, 2011, 2013; Maley, 2003; Mares, 2003; Prowse, 1998, 2011), it is now possible to assert that the majority of textbook authors use intuition as a background, often resorting to the reproduction of activities from other materials, and being less frequently guided by principles of L2 acquisition or any other theoretical framework (Tomlinson, 2012, pp. 152-153)

As regards pedagogical approaches, it is also evident that many current L2 learning materials still base

their lesson format on a presentation, practice and production (PPP) teaching procedure, sustained by the belief that a focus on specific structures leads to learning and acquisition, and that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught (Richards, 2006, p. 8). According to some authors (Skehan, 1996, p. 18), this belief has no credibility, despite being compatible with certain educational dogmas that tend not to prioritise communication, to reinforce teacher control, and to resort to coachable procedures.

Regardless of the limitations pointed out as to the use of textbooks, several studies show that the majority of language teachers, in different geographical spaces, continue to resort to the textbook as a working tool in the classroom. This same conclusion was reached by Tomlinson (2012, p. 158) based on two recent surveys: in the first survey, developed by the *British Council* (2008), 65 per cent of the teachers declared that they often used a textbook, whereas 6 per cent stated that they did not to use one on a regular basis. In the second survey, conducted in Malaysia, in the United Kingdom and in Vietnam, 92 per cent of respondents mentioned that they used a textbook regularly, even if 78 per cent were not pleased with the available contents.

Taking this context into account, and considering that a great part of the studies referred to above are based on the development of generic materials for learning English as an L2 in different geographical spaces, the present article shares the results of an analysis of some textbooks that have been used in the teaching of other languages.

## Aims of the study

In order to understand more deeply the characteristics of some of the materials used in the learning of Romance languages, this article aims to present some of the conclusions of a study which analysed eight entry-level textbooks adopted in a university context for the teaching of four Romance languages: Italian (*Campus Italia* and *Universitalia*); Spanish (*Destino Erasmus* and *Con Dinámica*); French (*Rond Point* and *Alter Ego*); and Portuguese (*Olá, Portugal!* and *Português XXI-1*).

In particular, the study aims to understand how the principles of textbook development are reflected in the roles they assign to the student, to the teacher and to the textbook itself in the learning process, as well as in the adopted approach.

We would like to underline that the goal of this analysis was merely to make a survey of the methodological characteristics adopted in each textbook. In this respect, we did not aim to assess its suitability potential to the target audience, or its effects on learning, which depend on much broader and complex factors. This aim also validates the use Littlejohn's (1998, 2011) framework for analysing materials, which provides a description of pedagogical materials for L2 teaching based on criteria that do not translate the perspective of the author about the characteristics that materials should present, as is the case in many other equivalent instruments (e.g. Cunningsworth, 1995; Byrd, 2001; McGrath, 2002; Harmer, 2007).

## Criteria for textbook selection

With these goals in mind and using the framework for analysing materials proposed by Andrew Littlejohn in 1998 (and revised in 2011), we analyse eight entry level textbooks aimed at the learning of four Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian). All the textbooks were first published between 2003 and 2010, by German publishers or in partnership with German publishers - respectively, *Universitalia* (Hueber), *Con Dinámica* (Klett), *Olá, Portugal!* (Klett), *Campus Italia* (Guerra Edizioni and Klett) - and the remaining by publishers based in countries whose national language is the target language of the textbook (with the exception of the French textbook *Rond Point*, which was published by the *Centre de Recherche et de Publications de Langue* based in Barcelona).

The Textbooks were selected according to the criteria presented below:

- (i) *the type of resource*; even though the materials referred to in this text are usually accompanied by other resources (e.g. audio CD, CD ROM, or even a website), we decided to focus the analysis on the textbook itself (and, in particular, on the student's book, that is still widely used in language courses).
- (ii) *the student's relationship with the language*; even though our analysis is generically focused on textbooks aimed at the teaching and learning of an L2 (i.e., any other language the subject has learned after L1 acquisition), almost all textbooks we have analysed are directed, specifically, at the learning of this language as a foreign language.
- (iii) *the target languages*; we have only analysed textbooks for the teaching of Romance languages

(Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian), taking into account that the literature on materials development covers mainly the development of L2 materials for the teaching of English.

- (iv) *the levels of learning*; the selected textbooks are aimed at an entry-level, therefore, we expect that the students have similar knowledge bases of the target language, i.e., little to none.
- (v) *the target audience and the learning context*; the eight textbooks were developed for adults or young adults and were adopted in a German university context (*Freie Universität Berlin*), and are also available for self-study in the Self-Learning Language Centre (*Selbstlernzentrum*) of the University.

Some of them were specifically designed for this learning context: the Italian textbooks (*Campus Italia* and *Universitalia*) and the Spanish textbook (*Con Dinámica*) were specifically developed for German university students. The textbook *Destino Erasmus* is aimed at university students from different nationalities, whereas the textbooks *Rond Point* and *Olá, Portugal!*, although they are directed at a German young adult audience, were not prepared specifically for a university context and can be used in other contexts such as Language Institutes. The remaining textbooks are directed only at an adult or young adult audience. The choice of a German university derives, mainly, from the fact that the institution is characterized by strongly promoting L2 learning and by privileging methodologically updated courses. This allowed us to locate recent working tools fit to our analysis.

## Textbook analysis process

Based on the criteria and aims referred to above, the process of analysis focused on two dimensions of the textbook, publication and approach: publication refers to the 'tangible' part of the textbook, while approach relates to the thinking underlying the materials, i.e., their 'philosophy'. In the first part we looked at the physical aspects of the materials (e.g. the relationship that may exist between the different components, and how the material it is divided into sections), while the second section in the framework involves consideration of areas such as the apparent aims of the materials; how tasks, language and content in the materials are selected and sequenced; teacher and learner roles, as well as the role the materials intend for themselves. For example, textbooks may aim to manage the whole learning process by providing detailed guidance in the teacher's book, on how teachers and students should act, or provide only general ideas that teachers and students are encouraged to develop or select from (Littlejohn, 2011, p. 184).

In building up an analysis of a set of materials, the teacher/analyst moves through different levels of analysis, making more and more inferences as they move from a consideration of the more easily identifiable aspects to more abstract and complex (see Figure 1).

The analysis of these materials was carried out gradually, in three stages: starting from a subjective selection of objective facts about the materials (Level 1), through deductions about the demands likely to be made of teachers and learners (Level 2), to conclusions about the apparent underlying principles and 'philosophy' (Level 3).

#### 1. "What is there?" 'objective description'

- statements of description
- physical aspects of material
- main steps in the instructional sections

#### 2. "What is required of users?" 'subjective analysis'

- subdivision into constituent tasks
- an analysis of tasks: what is the learner expected to do? Who with? With what context?

#### 2. "What is implied?" 'subjective inference'

- deducing aims, principles of selection and sequence
- deducing teacher and learner roles
- deducing demands on learner's process competence

Littlejohn (2011, p. 185)

### Figure 1

In the first level of analysis (the most objective), we have focused on the information that is explicitly provided by the materials, such as the date of publication, the intended audience, the type of material ('general' or 'specific purpose', 'supplementary' or 'main course'), the amount of school time required, and how the materials are to be used. In addition to these aspects, the analysis focused also on physical aspects of the material (such as their published form - durable or consumable worksheets, the number of pages, use of color, the number of components, student book, workbook, audio CD, etc.), and how the material is divide into sections.

In the second level, the analyst needs to draw deductions about what teachers and learners using the materials will have to do. In order to come to these conclusions, it is necessary to examine a selection of tasks (of each textbook). For our study, we used LittleJohn's definition of a task as 'any proposal contained within the materials for action to be undertaken by the learners, which has the direct aim of bringing about

the learning of the foreign language' (2011, p. 188), a broad definition that allows a wide range of activities, from traditional exercise to projects.

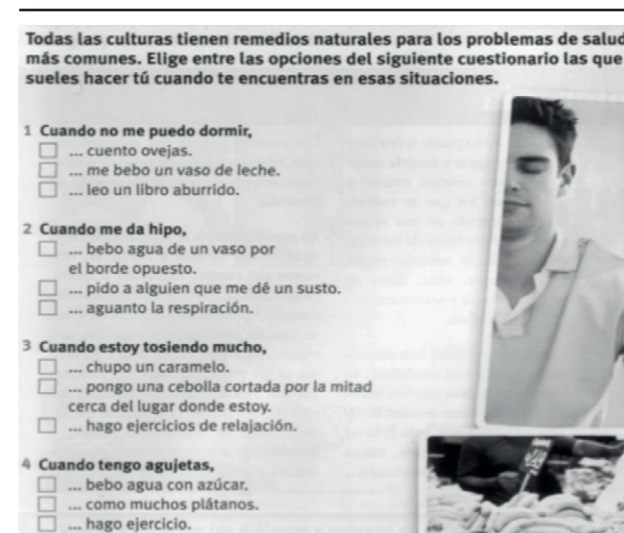
In order to enable the analyst to focus on the various aspects within tasks, Littlejohn (ibid., p. 189) distinguishes three key aspects: (i) the process through which students and teachers are to go (ii) classroom participation concerning who the learners are to work with; (iii) and the content that the students are to focus on.

Using the broad definition of task given above, we analysed a sample of the textbook tasks, looking at all the tasks proposed in the first and fifth unit of each book, corresponding to a total of 799 tasks, to find answers to three questions: what is the learner expected to do? who with? with what content?

The third and final level draws on findings at Level 1 and 2, to come to some general conclusions about the overall aims of the materials, the basis of selecting and sequencing both tasks and content, and the roles proposed for teachers and learners, which are presented below.

## Results

As regards the roles assigned by the textbook to the students in the classroom, we begin by pointing out that in almost all cases the analysed textbooks tend to control the content that is available and what is produced by the students through the presentation of guidelines or a script, even when the students' opinion is requested (see Figure 2).

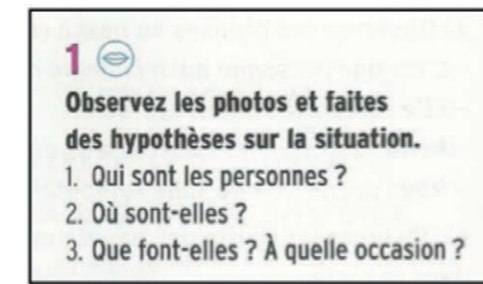


Destino Erasmus (2009, p. 61)

### Figure 2

However, we would like to highlight the textbooks *Alter Ego* and *Português XXI-1*, which, on the contrary, grant a reasonable experimentation space to the students by

proposing some tasks that are not limited by options or specific language structures (see Figure 3).



Alter Ego (2006, p.16)

### Figure 3

On the other hand, students are not expected to make decisions regarding their learning path, with this role being assigned (occasionally) to the teacher. This is particularly evident from the fact that methodological guidelines are mainly detailed in the teacher's book, which prevents a greater involvement of the students in their learning process.

We conclude, therefore, that the role assigned to the students by the textbook in the classroom is one of users whose performance is rather constrained by the options and guidelines of the textbook, and who have very few opportunities to participate in the decision-making process of teaching and learning.

We recognize, however, that the tendency to control the students' production (oral/written) and interaction is a common strategy in didactic tools aimed at the early stages of learning, since it is understood that the students do not possess a solid linguistic basis that allows them to develop, autonomously, the proposed topics. Nevertheless, we consider that the promotion of autonomy, in particular in adult students, also depends on the students' commitment to their own learning, which implies their involvement in the decision-making process, as well as the existence of an experimentation and testing space and this should be promoted by the materials from the early stages of learning a language, through more open activities (see Figure 3).

On the other hand, although the majority of the teachers' books include information on the adopted methodology, as well as suggestions for classroom implementation and for conducting tasks, only occasionally do they explicitly admit the possibility of an adaptation taking into account the learning context. We also stress the reduced number of tasks that predict any kind of interaction with the teacher or that request content that has the teacher as a source (e.g. where teacher shares his/her experience, tells a story, etc.), and in all the analysed tasks (799), we have identified only six tasks explicitly involving the

teacher and five tasks where the teacher is also the source of the available content.

In this sense, the teacher seems to have a role that is limited to managing tasks, functioning mostly as an intermediary between the textbook and the student. However, there are some textbooks that assign the teacher other functions, such as assessing the students' progress and acting as a complementary source to the textbook to which the students can resort when their linguistic knowledge does not allow them to understand or to use the target language autonomously.

As regards the students' role in the learning process, the analysis we have carried out has allowed us to verify that, despite valuing the students' life experiences which are frequently integrated and associated with the proposed content (even when they are limited to a set of pre-determined options), the majority of the textbooks integrate a significant number of tasks in which students have a predominantly receptive role and which do not involve any kind of production (written or oral), instead focusing on listening, understanding, matching and identifying the available information (see Figure 2).

We conclude, then, that the approach to learning a language in these textbooks is based, frequently, on understanding and reproducing models given by the textbook and accumulating a gradual and specific set of grammatical items, linguistic structures and vocabulary, involving the activation of world knowledge and the students' experiences.

The textbook tends to present itself as a structuring tool of the whole teaching and learning process, assuming the responsibility for all the suggested goals, as well as for the tasks and contents destined for the linguistic preparation of the students. Moreover, it seems to exert a strong control over both the available content - since it does not call upon other input external to the textbook, through tasks that require research and contact with other sources (we identified only one research task in the textbook *Olá, Portugal!*) - and the content produced by the student (to whom it generally grants little freedom in discourse management); assigning to the teacher the (predominate) role of executing the established guidelines and, occasionally, adapting them to the students' needs.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis we have carried out shows that textbooks tend to present great variations within themselves (with regard to the number of associated resources, the number of learning units and tasks, the number of scheduled working hours, the languages used, etc.), and globally advocate relevant Communicative Language Teaching methodological principles (e.g. learners learn a language through

using it to communicate; communication involves the integration of different language skills). However, we would like to stress that, based on a sample of almost eight hundred tasks, we noticed some inconsistencies that suggest that the working proposals often do not reflect the guidelines they, supposedly, stem from.

We consider, nevertheless, that in some cases (in particular, with regard to the little autonomy granted to the students), this mismatch may be attributed to the fact that these are entry-level textbooks that tend to resort to more closed tasks, as well as to scripts and controlled answers in order to provide guidance to the students. This choice is, from our point of view, excessive, since it limits experimental work and testing of hypotheses about the target language which students could benefit from.

Although we are not familiar with the materials design procedures adopted by the authors, we believe that the variations and inconsistencies referred to above may result from: i) the non-existence of common reference frameworks to support those responsible for material development; ii) the intuition and previous experiences of the textbook authors; and iii) the involvement of several authors in the materials development process.

Finally, we would like to stress that, in all textbooks, the organisation of sections in each unit normally consist of presentation, practice and production (PPP) moments, which seems to reflect the influence of some current assumptions of the Communicative Approach (Richards, 2006, p. 24) in its more moderate version, whose principles are currently questioned, since they address language teaching as a series of 'products' that can be acquired sequentially and cumulatively. Research has shown that students do not acquire language in this way; on the contrary, they build a series of systems (which comprise the so-called interlanguage) that will be gradually grammaticalized and restructured as new target language features are incorporated (Ellis and Shintani, 2014, pp. 43-44).

These results lead us also to conclude that some textbook procedures have become accepted as dogma to be followed, like the use of a PPP teaching procedure (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 20), and that there is still a gap between Applied Linguistics theory and materials development practice. We believe that commercial publishers should make more attempt to apply generally accepted principles of Second Language Acquisition to their material development, even though their integration would require innovations that sometimes seem difficult to apply.

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# On Foreign Cultural Content in English Textbooks: A Case study of the textbook used in Chinese Junior Middle Schools: *Go For It*

Zheng, Xiaohong & Zhou, Yan

## Outline

Textbooks play an important role in English teaching. This study focuses on the content analysis of foreign culture presented in the Chinese junior middle school English textbook series *Go For It* (henceforth GFI) according to criteria extracted from work by Byram and Morgan (1994) and Risager (1991). It investigates what foreign cultural content is presented in the textbooks, how it is presented and to what extent this cultural content can achieve the goals of culture teaching and meet students' needs to acquire competence in intercultural communication. The findings show that a variety of topics are introduced in the textbooks; most information appears in reading and dialogue texts; textbooks contain many facts of everyday life; and most cultural content presented in the textbooks is positive. However, an imbalance of some cultural contents about different countries is identified; there are few activities presenting cultural content or helping to promote cultural skills. The article concludes that cultural content and ways of teaching it in these textbooks fails ultimately to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

## Introduction

The necessity of integrating culture teaching in foreign language education has long been recognized by scholars and educators, but some teachers in junior middle schools in China still only explain new words, grammar rules, analyze sentences structures, and do translation. Little emphasis has been put on the development of students' ICC. Consequently, most students know little about the differences between what is meant and implied in different cultural contexts, not to say how to use English appropriately and effectively in intercultural communication.

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language cannot be reduced to the direct teaching of linguistic

knowledge of phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax; a vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness should be included (Chlopek, 2008, p.10). We should take the view that language is embedded in a particular culture – or in some cases such as English in several cultures – and learners inevitably learn about its underlying culture(s) while learning a language. However, new problems have emerged in the practical teaching and learning process, such as what categories of culture, which country's culture and what scope of the culture learners should learn in the language classroom. As an international language, one primary function of English is to enable speakers to share their ideas and culture with people coming from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, English learning should focus on improving learners' ability to understand cultures, including their own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures successfully, namely ICC.

In China, English is taught as a foreign language, so teaching materials play an important role in English teaching and learning. Cunningsworth states that 'teaching materials can exert considerable influence over what teachers teach and how they do it' (2002, p. 7). Often textbooks are used by teachers as tools to achieve teaching objectives since they know that the textbook writers have followed a given – usually national – curriculum; in some countries indeed textbooks must be approved by a ministry to ensure that they do serve to put the given curriculum into operation. However, even though the authors of the textbooks follow *the English Curriculum for Compulsory Education* (2011) (hereafter the *Curriculum*), the content still only reflects the authors' perceptions of issues and teachers may also use the textbooks for implementing their own agendas, and it is therefore important to examine English textbooks in terms of culture learning to see if the textbooks can equip English learners with adequate cultural knowledge and competence.

This study aims to investigate what categories of

foreign cultural content are presented in the textbook series *Go For It* (GFI) and how they are presented, as the series is widely used since it was published (2012) following the the Chinese Ministry of Education's issuing of the *Curriculum*. The study investigates two aspects of cultural content; one is the presentation the culture of 'The Inner Circle' countries (Kachru, 1992, p.38), another aspect is detailed foreign cultural content based on criteria modified from the criteria suggested by Byram and Morgan (1994) and Risager (1991). The contents of the textbook are categorised using modified criteria and analyzed to evaluate to what extent the cultural content- can achieve the goals of culture teaching.

## Culture

Defining the word 'culture' is not an easy task. On a general level, culture has been referred to as 'the ways of people accepted and prized often by people from the same group or community' (Lado, 1957, p.110). However, we need a clear definition of 'culture' in this study. It may be useful to cite Byram's definition here. According to Byram (2008, p.60), culture is 'shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group'. The beliefs in question are the 'shared meanings' which justify and underpin their behaviours and the 'social representations' they hold in common. There are also shared 'values' that include the values attached to their beliefs and behaviours, and the attitudes they have towards their shared social representations.

## Culture teaching

Language and culture can barely be separated from each other since they are in mutual interaction with each other: language affects culture and culture affects language. According to Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991, p.5), language is the main medium to express other phenomena, including culture. It expresses the values, beliefs and meanings and it also refers to the objects of a given culture.

Buttjes (1991, p.8) claims that several research disciplines have acknowledged the need to teach culture as a part of language learning and teaching. The psychological concern of language learners' cultural awareness is a rather new argument for the teaching of culture. Gao Yihong (2001, p.146) suggests 'productive bilingualism' and advocates that 'going beyond culture' is more important than 'going across cultures'. She believes that the outcome of second language learning should involve not only target culture but also mother culture. What's more, it involves the ability to evaluate and incorporate different information. More pragmatic reasons, such as travelling and commerce, are perhaps more traditional and well-known reasons for teaching culture since cultural knowledge is obviously needed for international contact and communication.

However, teachers in China are often confused about what to teach due to the vast definition of culture and the vagueness of the requirement. Cultural knowledge is introduced to students only in a sporadic way and the socio-cultural competence of Chinese learners is far behind their linguistic competence (Zhang Hongling, 2007, p.177).

## Textbook evaluation for cultural content

Although we live in the era of computers, textbooks have not lost their power and popularity as one of the most important foreign language instructional materials in language teaching. In the Chinese context, many English teachers regard textbooks as authorities (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999, p.196-219) and many English teachers take the English textbooks as an indispensable resource for their everyday teaching. Students expect teachers to help their knowledge to expand based on the content presented in textbooks. Thus, the cultural content of textbooks has a great influence on teachers and learners due to their dependence on them. There are various ways of analysing culture. One is to group culture under three headings: high culture, deep culture and popular culture (Hu, 1988). Another popular way is to divide it into two categories: culture with a big C (representing art, literature, music and so on) and culture with a small c (referring to societal values, behaviours etc.). Another influential classification of culture in China is to group it into 'cultural communication information' and 'cultural knowledge information', as put forward by Zhang (1987). Byram and Morgan (1994, p.51) examined the cultural content in textbooks and argued that they should include a focus on nine areas: 1) Social identity and social groups 2) Social interaction 3) Belief and behaviour 4) Social-political institutions 5) Socialization and the life-cycle 6) National history 7) National geography 8) National cultural heritage 9) Stereotypes and national identity. Among all the thorough lists of criteria for textbook evaluation found in the literature, Byram and Morgan's checklist focuses on cultural content particularly. Byram and Morgan's criteria are more comprehensive and practical than previous studies and cover almost every aspect of culture from its 'essence' to the materials infrastructure. Risager (1991, p.182) has also created criteria, or categories, for evaluating cultural content in textbooks. Her four criteria are as follows: 1) The micro level - phenomena of social and cultural anthropology 2) The macro level - social, political and historical matters 3) International and intercultural issues 4) Points of view and style of the textbook author(s). Risager's criteria are rather similar to the criteria by Byram and Morgan apart from the additional categories of international and intercultural issues.

Although the set of criteria used for this study is based on those in the literature described above, there are some modifications necessary to make them more

appropriate for analyzing textbooks in China because cultural content cannot be presented inclusively due to limited class time and the students' level of English. There are some overlaps between the criteria of the different authors so Risager's distinction between the micro level and the macro level is not used. As 'stereotypes' are a kind of misunderstanding, this item is also removed (Hong Ming and Weng Qingqing, 2012, p. 21). Five categories are modified as the framework to analyze and evaluate GFI: 1) social identity and social groups 2) social interaction, belief and behaviour 3) socio-political institutions, socialization 4) national history, geography, cultural heritage and identity 5) international and intercultural issues.

## Study design

### Research questions

This study investigates what categories of foreign cultural content are presented in *GFI* and the ways in which they are presented. The study concentrates on analysis of the presentation of cultures of 'The Inner Circle' countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada, using the five categories of foreign cultural content whose development is described above. After that, the ways of presentation are discussed. In a final stage, we evaluate to what extent the cultural content can achieve the goals of culture teaching according to the *Curriculum*.

Therefore, the study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What categories of cultural content are presented in the textbooks?
2. How is cultural content presented in the textbooks?
3. To what extent can cultural content presented in the textbooks achieve the goals of culture teaching in China?

### Corpus

The *GFI* series (*the students' book* and *the teacher's book*, henceforth *Students'* and *Teacher's*) written for Chinese students in junior middle school from Grade 7 to Grade 9, aged from 13 to 15, was chosen for this study because, firstly, *GFI* obtains a national circulation and is the most widely-used teaching material throughout China. *GFI*, published by People's Education Press, is co-edited by Liu Daoyi, Zheng Wangquan and David Nunan, with its preface suggesting that it 'encompasses considerable cultural content from China, English-speaking countries and non-English speaking countries'. *GFI* consists of five books, including five volumes of *Students'* and *Teacher's* books. Each volume is composed of 12, 12, 12, 10 and 15 units respectively, and a reading part

is added in Book 4 and Book 5. Each unit consists of three parts: **Section A** (a picture with some conversations to practice key vocabulary in a real world setting with audio recordings, followed by some step-by-step activities), **Section B** (new vocabulary while recycling the language presented in Section A followed by activities), **Self-check** (revision of the key vocabulary and grammar items). The categories which are examined in the corpus are the materials which present five categories of cultural content to answer the first research question.

### Data collection and analysis

*Content analysis* was applied as the instrument to collect and analyse the data. Content analysis is a method of examining written texts that enables their systematic and objective analysis by counting instances of words, phrases or grammatical structures that fall into specific categories. In order to find out whether the cultural content in the textbooks follows the theory of intercultural learning and teaching of Byram, theory-based content analysis was used.

Firstly, the relevant texts were collected from the *Students'* and *Teacher's* books. Secondly, the data was reduced only to issues relevant to the theory, since in structured theory-based content analysis, only content that belongs under the chosen criteria is included in the analysis. In the application here the framework focused on the following:

**Social identity and social groups:** professions, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, policemen and teachers, etc.

**Social interaction and belief and behaviour:** situations of social interaction, such as introducing people, asking for and giving directions, accepting and declining invitations, traditional festivals and rituals of religious practice, as well as routines from daily life like table manners, etc.

**Socio-political institutions and socialization:** socio-political institutions and institutions of socialization (families, schools and employment).

**National history, geography and cultural heritage** as well as national identity: historical events, monuments and cultural artefacts related to literature and arts.

**International and intercultural issues:** comparisons between different cultures such as Chinese traditional culture and social etiquettes in different cultures.

The result of the analysis is a general and summarized presentation of the data. Ways of presentation such as types of text and cultural notes in *Teacher's* are also collected to answer the second research questions. Lastly, the cultural content and ways of presentation are interpreted to evaluate the extent to which they can meet the requirements of the *Curriculum* (see Appendix Table 1).

## Research findings and discussion

### Categories of cultural content

The analysis concentrates on finding out what foreign cultural content is presented in textbooks. Table 2 (see Appendix) presents the main findings quantitatively. For example in Category C2 in Book B3 there are 4 examples of 'Social interaction' and 13 examples of 'Belief and behaviour'.

Table 2 illustrates that all the five categories are presented in the textbooks, Category 2 related to social interaction and beliefs and behaviour ranks highest (31%), while social identity and social groups rank lowest. This category includes social-political institutions, national history, national geography, and national cultural heritage which receive a limited portion of attention (less than 10%). Meanwhile, belief and behaviour, international and intercultural issues gain significantly higher frequency, about 20%. As the number of units is different in the books, it is not appropriate to compare the percentage of cultural content in each book.

To further investigate the cultural content, the specific topics found in the target textbooks are discussed below. The following section gives examples of each category:

### Social identity and social groups

Social classes, regional identity and ethnic minority are not mentioned too much in the textbooks. The differences between social classes are not obviously presented. The stories of immigrants are not found in the textbooks either. Professional identity is mostly described by giving examples of professions but these examples are not elaborated further. Some highly appreciated professions, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, policemen and teachers, are mentioned. Most jobs are mentioned when students talk about their future career plans.

### Social interaction, belief and behaviour

Model dialogues in different cultural situations, routines and rituals of religion, moral beliefs, sports games, table manners, healthy food and leisure activities are well presented. Many model dialogues and routines come from daily life within a social group, and the moral and religious beliefs are given for students to practise with their partner in common situations of interaction. These are mainly discussed through national holidays, sports, eating habits and shopping and traditional American festivals, such as New Year's Day, April Fool's Day, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas are introduced. Themes like sports, healthy food, table manners, shopping and leisure activities are mentioned in the textbooks. Some

popular sports are baseball, tennis, ping-pong, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and swimming. Students learn about and discuss food and eating customs in different parts of the world. Some of Americans' favourite leisure activities are given as watching television, charity work and shopping.

### Socio-political institutions, socialization

State institutions (e.g. health-care), their meanings and values as well as institutions of socialization (families, schools and employment) are presented. Some socio-political institutions like the United Nations and its flag as well as the BBC are mentioned when students just begin to learn English letters. The structure of a family is illustrated as an example of institutions of socialization. A family tree is used to help students to understand the structure of a family. Schools and education are discussed from many different angles such as educational institutions, education system and school activities. Educational institutions from universities to secondary education are mentioned. Employment is presented in the textbooks mainly by showing the process of job-hunting. 'Wanted' ads, applicant letters, job interviews are all involved. Career counsellors, personality tests, part-time jobs, and work experience are introduced for students' preparation for their future work.

### National history, geography, cultural heritage and identity

Historical and contemporary events, some inventions and geographical factors which are significant in the constitution of the nation and its identity are introduced. Some historical events are recorded such as Man's first walk on the moon and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center which has significance for most Americans. In addition, the history of inventions, including the car, the telephone, TV, the calculator, the computer, potato chips, the Frisbee and basketball are presented. Some geographic factors presented are significant for the members of the culture and others are important for outsiders in intercultural communication. Many big cities are presented here, e.g. New York, Boston, Chicago, California, London, Sydney, Toronto, Paris, Tokyo and Moscow. Cultural artefacts of classical and popular culture familiar to the members of a nation are presented. Most examples of the symbols of national identities such as famous monuments and people belong to this section. Some monuments mentioned occasionally are the Hollywood sign, Broadway, Disneyland, Big Ben, the Sydney Opera House, the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral, and in China, the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, the Palace Museum, Tian'an Men Square, and the Oriental Pearl TV Tower: these can all be seen as landmarks in their countries. Some famous people, such as musicians, actors, authors and athletes, are mentioned in textbooks. American writers

Earnest Hemingway and Mark Twain are mentioned in the listening tasks. Some sports stars such as Michael Jordan, Martina Hingis, David Beckham, Ronaldo and Tiger Woods are mentioned. Scientists such as Edison, Newton, Curie and Stephen Hawking are also presented. Some other symbols of national identity such as flags are mentioned here.

### International and intercultural issues

In this section, comparisons between different cultures found in the textbooks are introduced. The categories are mutual representations, images, relations, cultural power and dominance, co-operation and conflict. Comparisons of education systems are discussed in the Teacher's books. Public schools are different in the US and Britain: in the United States, there is a national education system or a national curriculum, each state has a Department of Education. The difference between a British 'public school' and 'comprehensive school' is explained. Many school activities such as the school day, Arts Festivals, school clubs, and extra-curricular activities are presented. Some Chinese culture is introduced in the textbooks, such as the Beijing Opera, Chinese kung fu, and traditional Chinese medicine. Some famous Chinese people like Confucius, Shen Nong and Lu Xun are mentioned as well. In addition, social etiquette in different cultures is introduced. Different concepts of time between a Colombian and a Swiss student are presented. When they meet, people are supposed to shake hands in the United States and Mexico, bow in Japan and Korea, and kiss on the cheek in Brazil. Table manners in the United States, Peru, China, Korea, Brazil, Japan, and France are also compared.

### Cultural content in Teacher's books

Social interaction, belief and behavior are introduced to raise students' cultural awareness. Social convention such as the appropriate time to arrive at most formal business or social gatherings in America is within five or ten minutes of the stated commencement time. Some international associations and traditional holiday foods are also introduced. Healthy foods, vegetarianism, some traditional holiday foods, and food culture are introduced. The National Basketball Association (NBA) as well as ice hockey in Canada are mentioned. Shopping also seems to be a popular theme, and shopping malls with restaurants and movie theatres where it is possible for families to spend the whole day are introduced. Advertising in the United States is presented by quoting some of the most famous slogans, e.g. *Diamonds are forever; Just do it; Ask for more.*

Socio-political institutions and socialization are introduced, for example, traditional and non-traditional families in the United States. Currently, almost one third of families with children under 18 in the US are

from single parent families. In a traditional family, children will leave home when they go to college. As Americans do not usually live in extended families, most parents do not live with their children when they become senior citizens. This is quite different from the traditional Chinese family structure.

National history, geography, cultural heritage and identity are discussed. Wild animals in Australia are also presented, e.g. kangaroos, koala bears, wallabies, wombats, and the duck-billed platypus. There are some brief introductions about the Oscars, sitcoms and types of music. Some of the most common types of music, e.g. jazz, classical, rap, country, rock, and pop, are listed. Chinese culture such as table manners in Mongolia and Tibet are introduced as well. The idea of 'The American dream' is explained.

### Presentation of cultural content

Foreign cultural content is presented in a wide variety of ways (see Appendix Table 3). After scrutinising and analysing the ways in which cultural knowledge is presented in the five GFI textbooks, 27 categories were identified, the main ones being: pictures (53 times), culture notes (46 times), passages (38 times), dialogues (28 times), listenings (10 times), role plays (9 times), writing (8 times), letters (6 times), e-mails and advertisements (4 times).

A number of aspects of the presentation of cultural content are notable. Firstly, most information appears only in readings and dialogues, and related knowledge is introduced in the 'Culture Notes' in the *Teachers'* books. Take social interaction as an example. The nature of interaction presented in the textbooks is usually more informal and subjective between close friends or relatives. At the end of the interview there is an outcome. It is common in all these examples that the interaction between people goes on very smoothly and there are no misunderstandings, hesitations, conferring questions or pauses.

Secondly, the textbooks include many facts of everyday life, but solutions to solve problems in intercultural communication are not mentioned a lot. For example, in reality something unexpected may always happen and it is possible that people may have to repeat their questions or they might mishear something.

Some texts are written from the point of view of young Americans who describe what it is like to live in America. Stern claimed that 'understanding of literary works presupposes an understanding of the culture' (1992, p.229). The message carried by the literature works are what Cunningsworth called the 'hidden curriculum' (1995, p.90) and will be more memorable and valuable than the explicitly stated cultural details.

Thirdly, most cultural content presented in the textbooks is positive. Whether representing Chinese

culture or foreign cultures, all cultural content needs to be critically analyzed. In some passages, writers express their worries, disappointment and criticism of some problems and phenomena, but it might be more rewarding to have students explore solutions and make their own decisions. Therefore, more information and opinions should be presented to trigger students to think deeply and critically. These selections can enlighten students, thus improving their understanding and tolerance of other cultures.

### Achievement of goals of culture teaching

Most of the cultural content stipulated in the Chinese *Curriculum* is actually presented in the textbooks, according to the findings of this research, although with some inevitably missing due to the comprehensive nature of the *Curriculum* criteria.

### A critique of cultural content in GFI

The *GFI* textbooks appear to include more on American culture than on other 'Inner Circle' countries. Some cultural content necessary to raise learners' awareness of interactive skills and flexibility is neglected. Furthermore, A lot of passages reflect American culture particularly, but other English-speaking communities are seldom involved. It appears that some information presented is rather arbitrary, and not systematically organized. Some implicit cultural content as well as non-verbal aspects are neglected, such as social classes, regional identity, ethnic minorities, religious beliefs and gestures and facial expressions in communication. Few examples of non-verbal behaviour is presented. One example given is that in the United States, it is common for a man to shake hands with another man when being introduced or when greeting a male friend. It will surely be helpful for learners but it would also be important for the learner to be aware that behaviour does not necessarily follow the given model pattern in different social contexts.

### Numbers of exercises and activities presenting cultural content

Exercises in the textbooks mainly aim at linguistic objectives and fail to incorporate linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge. More explicit explanations of guidelines and objectives to guide how teachers should teach cultural contents should be provided in the *Teacher's* books. In this way, teachers could be made more aware of cultural content and of ways to expose students to ICC. The current ways that textbooks present cultural content can barely inspire students to learn. In order to get students more interested in learning culture, poetry, plays, pictures, songs and games may also be used to present it. The explanations of some confusing content, such as social events, slang, myths, or history, etc. should be

given, for example in the form of footnotes, which can facilitate students' understanding of extracts from texts. Thus, authentic texts taken from newspapers, magazines or novels and other literary works can be used in textbooks together with notes or comments to help interpretation. Few real-life and authentic interactions presenting problems, misunderstandings or quarrels (including those resulting from intercultural communication) are presented in textbooks, but these should be included as well.

Textbooks should stimulate students' learning by virtue of the designed exercises, for one of the textbooks' functions is to foster students' intercultural competence through the series of activities related to actual life. According to Byram (2008, p.69), critical cultural awareness is an important part of ICC. Critical cultural awareness means 'an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries'. Students should also be encouraged to learn about and raise their awareness of both their own culture and the foreign culture, as they can use their own culture as a reference for comparing the differences and diversity that exist within all cultures.

Shu Dingfang and Zhang Yigang (2004) did a survey of English textbooks, saying 'students wish that they could learn English in a more natural, pleasant and interesting way'. Articles in textbooks can be linked closely with different social contexts and students' real-life experiences, thus exposing them to cultural diversity and developing their multicultural awareness. Students can learn about various cultures by contrasting them, learning to express themselves relatively appropriately in English and gradually acquiring ICC.

### Neglect of content and ways to achieve goals of cultural teaching

Comparison of American and British education systems is briefly made in the *Teacher's* books, however, there are no relevant activities in the Students' books to explore the differences and then infer educational values. Related to the themes covered in the books, it can be argued that greater attention should be paid to themes such as values, customs, holidays and body language in order to enhance students' communicative competence e.g. their sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. A clear structure should also be used to organize the cultural contents. More details and introductions can help students have a better understanding of the given topics.

In the textbooks, there are only a few references to socio-political institutions and most of them are only mentioned by name and their meanings are not discussed further. However, some other socio-political

institutions and their work are listed in a post-reading activity together with simple descriptions of them. Examples include ‘Greenpeace cares for ‘Mother Earth’; ‘Doctors Without Borders helps sick people in poor countries’; ‘The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) helps children in poor countries’; ‘The World Wildlife Fund cares for wild animals in danger’.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999, p. 210) state that ‘culture learning through textbooks might also be seen as a process of dialogue in which students negotiate meaning and identity vicariously with the author of textbooks and its cultural contents.’ However, this is mediated in the classroom by a teacher who manages the way in which the students see the culture mirrored in textbooks. The complexity of culture requires that the language teacher is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a ‘mediator’ between culture and students.

## Conclusion

This study reveals what foreign cultural content is present and how it is presented in the *GFI* series through using criteria drawn from Byram and Morgan (1994) and Risager (1991). The results provide some useful information for teaching and learning cultural content not only in Junior middle school in China where the research and materials were set, but also beyond this context. The study suggests changes that might be made in textbooks in order to teach cultural contents; authentic texts and real problems should be included, and critical thinking should be addressed. It is hoped, finally, that this study of culture teaching in textbooks can offer some insights for further research in the Chinese context and beyond.

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## Appendix

Rank 5 Students can:	Contents in the textbooks
1. Know the most common body language in English communication, such as gestures and facial expressions etc.	Social interaction
2. Use different forms of address, greetings and farewells appropriately in English.	Social interaction
3. Know the difference between male and female names and common affectionate forms of address	Social interaction
4. Understand eating and drinking customs in English-speaking countries.	Routines of behavior
5. Respond appropriately to other people’s compliments, requests and apology, etc.	Social interaction
6. Use appropriate forms to give compliments, make requests, etc.	Social interaction
7. Know initially geographical and position, climate features, history etc. of English-speaking countries.	National geography
8. Understand the interaction customs in English-speaking countries.	Social interaction
9. Understand the traditional leisure and sporting activities of English-speaking countries.	Routines of behavior
10. Understand the main holidays and festivals of English-speaking countries and how they are celebrated.	Routines of behavior
11. Know further about Chinese culture by comparing the Chinese culture and foreign cultures.	Intercultural issues
12. Introduce the main festivals and typical cultural customs of China in English.	Intercultural issues

Table 1 Description of cultural awareness for English teaching in junior middle school.

	Category/ Book	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	Total	Percentage	Percentage
C1	Social identity and social groups	0	8	6	6	2	22	8.4%	8.4%
C2	Social interaction	12	6	4	2	6	30	11.5%	31.7%
	Belief & behaviour	17	4	13	3	16	53	20.2%	
C3	Socio-political institutions	2	0	0	5	0	7	2.7%	15.6%
	Socialization	9	4	6	5	10	34	13.0%	
C4	National history	0	0	2	2	4	8	3.1%	25.2%
	National geography	0	9	4	1	4	18	6.9%	
	National cultural heritage	2	1	4	1	3	11	4.2%	
C5	National identity	3	0	10	3	13	29	11.1%	
	International and intercultural issues	9	11	11	9	10	50	19.1%	19.1%
	Total	54	43	60	37	68	262	100.0%	100.0%
	Percentage	20.6%	16.4%	22.9%	14.1%	26.0%	-	-	-

Table 2 Distribution and percentage of cultural contents in textbook (C1 etc. for Category 1, B1 etc for ‘Book 1’, including *Students’* and *Teacher’s*)

	Presentation	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Total
1	passage	4	8	6	11	9	38
2	picture	2	12	9	15	15	53
3	dialogue	1	17	3	1	6	28
4	listening	2	7	1	0	0	10
5	role play	1	0	0	8	0	9
6	review	1	0	0	0	0	1
7	culture notes	0	26	1	15	4	46
8	notes	0	3	0	0	0	3
9	letter	0	4	1	0	1	6
10	e-mail	0	2	1	0	1	4
11	writing	0	1	2	1	4	8
12	debate	0	1	0	0	0	1
13	story	0	1	0	0	0	1
14	ad	0	1	3	0	0	4
15	invitation card	0	1	0	0	0	1
16	bulletin board notice	0	1	0	0	0	1
17	recipes	0	1	0	0	0	1
18	chant	0	0	1	0	0	1
19	diary	0	0	1	0	0	1
20	group work	0	0	1	0	0	1
21	poster	0	0	0	1	0	1
22	movie review	0	0	0	1	1	2
23	exercise	0	0	0	2	0	2
24	newspaper article	0	0	0	1	0	1
25	map	0	0	0	0	2	2
26	article	0	0	0	0	2	2
27	diagram	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Total	6	15	12	10	11	

Table 3 Presentation of foreign cultural content in the textbooks



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# The Culture of the Classroom: A framework for developing culturally appropriate materials for Arab learners

Paul Benjamin

## Introduction

The 2015 issue of this journal (16/2) contained an article by Rod Bolitho that asked interesting questions about what publishers look for when they commission coursebooks as well as who exactly is best placed to write text books and materials for 21st Century learners. One quote that, to me at least, seemed most salient was that writers of global coursebooks 'are by definition remote from most of the contexts they are writing for, and no amount of conference appearances across the world will bring them close to some of the classrooms where their books are used' (Bolitho, 2015, p. 5).

In my article in the same edition of *Folio* I attempted to tackle the notion of cultural appropriacy when developing materials for Arab learners and hopefully succeeded in emphasising my conviction that whilst it is essential that materials used in this context are respectful to, and even if necessary avoid mention of, the Islamic faith, it is this criterion alone that appears to be the litmus test used by publishers that decides whether materials are indeed 'culturally appropriate' for Arab learners. To that end, this article aims to take Bolitho's points and those made in my own article (Benjamin, 2015) and outline a principled framework for analysing materials used in the Arab World based on more than this lone criterion. The key underpinning principle to this framework is 'the Culture of the Classroom' (ibid: p.30), which emphasises the primacy of the interests and needs of the learners in the classroom in the selection and adaptation of materials with the goal of offering learners materials that are capable of improving intrinsic motivation.

One point made in Bolitho's article was the conclusion that 'frameworks are useful as long as they don't become straightjackets' (Bolitho, 2015, p. 7), which is important for this article as it goes to the heart of the culture of the classroom: although the framework outlined below is supposed to offer guidance and encourage evaluation of materials for the wider context of classrooms in the Middle East, it must not be viewed as the 'right' or 'only' way. This is not my intention. Rather, I hope this framework can encourage

teachers, stakeholders and, hopefully, publishers to approach materials development in the Middle East far more holistically, leading to selection of texts and activities that are based on a more complete understanding of the culture of the learners in a class rather than approve texts and materials simply because they have no obvious religious overtones. In short, this framework is a starting point for materials developers and must remain flexible enough to allow individualised development of materials based on the needs of any set of learners but is intended at all stages to improve intrinsic motivation.

## Theoretical Grounding

In classrooms across the Middle East intrinsic motivation is a common problem as a lack of motivation in general is an issue faced by learners across the Arab World (Rabab'ah, 2005, 184). This is owed, in part, to many of these learners (especially from the wealthy petroleum exporting countries of the Arabian Gulf) often feeling they need to do very little at school owing to their generally wealthy backgrounds and excellent job prospects when they finish school. It is, therefore, far more common for learners, especially young learners, in this region to be driven by extrinsic motivational factors such as parental pressure, face-saving by passing exams and, in the case of older learners, the need to pass an exam such as IELTS or TOEFL to enter university at home or abroad.

One way to counter this is to drive motivation through the content of classes by creating inherently interesting and enjoyable activities (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 55). Motivation is not aided in this context if materials do not relate to the world of the learners, as demonstrated by Abu-Rabia's study of Arab learners (2003, p. 347) which showed that their interest and the type of text used in class are powerful predictors of comprehension and that material based on culturally familiar content is more likely to be of interest and improve their performance. Other studies such as Barnitz (1986, pp. 109-110) support this assertion; 'readers construct meaning in terms of their own prior knowledge, goals

and belief systems. These aspects of cognition serve as filters of relevant and irrelevant information; thus culturally variant readers may distort text information or add information not relevant to the text'. Barnitz also cites studies from Johnson (1981 and 1982) that demonstrate that relevant cultural origin in reading material is a far more important factor in explaining comprehension than language complexity.

The practical implications would be to create a more positive learning environment by trying to be realistic about the learners' abilities and expectations, and use warmers, icebreakers and communicative tasks to aid motivation (Dörnyei, 2008, 19-21). Although most teachers have a coursebook that provides their materials, adaptation and selection of supplementary material can bring greater focus (Watkins, 2005, 114). This is important with young learners in particular as a focus on task properties, meaning that the teacher should be critical of tasks and improve or adapt them according to learner needs and interests, can lead to improved task design or selection. This can, in turn, enhance motivation as tasks selected and planned in this way can be catered to learner needs or interests (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 57).

In any classroom situation the selection of tasks will be influenced by the methodology that the teacher or the institution has chosen to employ. Schools and institutions in the Middle East are increasingly requiring teachers to employ a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology in class, with a tendency towards more teacher-guided 'shallow end', also known as 'weak', approaches to CLT (See Thornbury, 1999, p. 18 and Watkins, 2005, p. 11 for more on this approach to CLT). Such an approach will typically include a deductive introduction to the language, meaning that the teacher will usually provide the learners with an introduction to and possibly an explanation and/or examples of a specific language point needed for that lesson. This introduction would then usually be followed by controlled and guided practice sections of a lesson and proves to be, in my experience at least, a favourable methodology to employ with Arab learners.

This choice of methodology is based on the ongoing, albeit receding, culturally engrained belief in the Middle East that methodologies which rely on the learners' individual thoughts or elicitation are unfair and the role of the teacher is to impart knowledge and guide learners equally (Swan and Smith, 2001, p. 209). To this end, the weak form of CLT is usually favoured by institutions as it is believed (rightly or wrongly) to be a compromise between methodologies that encourage learner autonomy and the conventional orthodoxy surrounding the roles of the teacher and learners in the classroom. In my view there is some merit to this assessment as it could be argued that weak forms of CLT do provide a bridge between traditional

knowledge-impartation methodologies and more recent learner-centred approaches, by offering limited and slightly controlled opportunities for learners to work independently of the teacher in pairs or groups whilst still being given the underpinning guidance typical of weak-form CLT approaches. This 'bridge' can be implemented before embarking on a more wholesale shift in methodology away from the orthodoxy of the region outlined above.

This orthodoxy is present at the very earliest stages of education in the Middle East and a teacher who arrives in an institution in this part of the world will quickly realise that the learners will typically struggle with tasks that require them to act with minimum input from the teacher not because they are incapable of completing them but usually because they simply have not been taught as they have grown up how to think independently or critically. In some countries in the region (notably the UAE) there is an increasing drive to engrain these skills at ever younger ages but the process is understandably a long term one. For these reasons, the framework below will assume the presence of a shallow-end CLT methodology and the criteria it offers to evaluate materials will be catered towards this.

## The Origins of the Framework

This framework was developed as a central component of my MA dissertation wherein it was used to adapt a selection of published materials found in a coursebook in wide circulation in the Middle East. I wanted to tackle the issue of materials development in the Middle East by way of a framework as I felt that many students in the region view learning and class content only in light of how it will help them to pass exams rather than as something to engage them and enrich their knowledge of the world. As such, I hope this framework can contribute towards challenging this outlook by helping to make classroom materials fundamentally intrinsically motivating to provide learners with a reason to learn and participate beyond passing exams. To quote again from Bolitho (2015, p. 5), 'the biggest single fallacy in our field is that learners learn what textbooks offer and what teachers teach... They learn what they want to learn and when they are ready to learn, and teachers have even less control over that than was once the case'.

This analysis could not be more true of a context than it is of the Middle East: any teacher who has worked in the Arab Gulf will identify with the issues we face with classroom control and management, and, as outlined above, intrinsic motivation. The unstoppable progress of the digital age has seen schools in the Middle East rush to embrace technology. More and more schools, especially in the UAE, are turning to Computer Assisted Learning on an individual and industrialised scale with learners increasingly being given their own

computers or tablets for use specifically in class to aid learning. Publishers have embraced this by producing coursebooks that operate on iPads or laptops, whilst for the learners this development places the whole world at their fingertips during class time, and it is only natural that curiosity leads them to seek input online that they themselves find stimulating. This is where this framework and the culture of the classroom become central to the process of materials selection as we need a model that complements this new dawn in education and the things that learners find intrinsically motivating and we need to use these to provide classroom content that learners will freely engage with and not view as disconnected from their everyday lives.

## The Framework for Analysing Materials

The purpose of this section is to outline a clear framework against which materials in wide circulation in the Middle East can be evaluated, or as a starting point for teachers to develop materials themselves. The framework is divided into three sections: first, the language needs of the learners; second, the cultural needs of the learners; and third, an identifiable CLT methodology. What will emerge is a checklist that materials can be compared against so that principled decisions can be reached about the content of the materials and whether the materials meet the needs of Arab learners. As discussed above, the overarching objective is to produce materials that are able to boost the intrinsic motivation of Arab learners by relating the materials to the culture of the classroom with the assumption made that by doing so, the learners' desire to engage with the materials as well as their overall language production will be improved.

Although this framework has largely been developed to suit the classes of teenage and young adult males I have taught in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, it is hoped that its content will actually be of use to teachers in similar teaching contexts as I consider it likely that the concerns, interests and culture of the group of learners in my learning contexts will not be too different from those of any class of teenage boys in the Gulf region or indeed elsewhere. The framework is not considered to be exhaustive. Clearly there will be aspects that do not fit every situation and the very essence of the culture of the classroom is that for any given context there may be additions and changes that have to be made, in particular for teachers who are teaching female-only classes in the Middle East. It does, however, provide a starting point that any teacher in the Gulf can use to analyse their materials before they use them with their classes. The framework could also be used to analyse materials for older Arabic speakers such as business professionals, but appropriate adaptations will need to be made in particular to the specifics of the culture of

the classroom (e.g. older adults may have no interest in superheroes). It is also important to note that any one piece of material cannot be expected to meet every aspect of the framework, particularly the language aspects. To expect otherwise would jeopardise the efficacy of the material as well as the cohesion of a scheme of work as material that attempts to impart too much to learners is often overwhelming and ineffective.

## Language Needs

The need for materials to be evaluated according to this framework and potentially tailored to the learners' language needs has to be tallied with the consideration that explicit teaching of certain problem areas can be of little value. Arabic speakers commonly struggle to differentiate between the /p/ and /b/ phonemes in English (See Al-Badawi, 2012) or to correctly integrate articles into their written and spoken English (see Crompton, 2011). If the decision is taken to explicitly teach such morpheme-level language items, Crompton recommends a focus on reading and writing as well as repetition which would, combined with teachers helping with identifying the problems and its origins, form the basis of a series of consciousness-raising (CR) tasks that can promote noticing (ibid.). As a common goal of CLT is to place primary emphasis on fluency over accuracy (Whong, 2011), articles, as well as other morpheme-level language items will be addressed in this framework through the promotion of noticing and CR rather than through explicit teaching. In this section of the framework, Criteria 1-4 are drawn from the discussion in my article in Folio 16/2 (Benjamin, 2015, pp. 31-32) about the importance of top-down processing, text authenticity and issues faced by Arab learners with reading and writing.

## The Criteria for the Framework

The criteria that form this framework will be set out as a series of questions which should be asked of the material we wish to evaluate. The criteria that evaluate the efficacy of materials targeting the receptive skills of Arabic learners are outlined below:

1. Does the material provide opportunity for the learners to read or interact with a text that demonstrates relevant features of genre in an authentic manner? (Texts should ideally be graded at a level that learners can understand but are also challenging in line with Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (1981).
2. Does the material provide opportunity for the learners to produce an extended piece of original writing?
3. Do comprehension questions focus the learners' attention on the key points of the text?

4. Are pre-reading activities provided which allow learners to glean the gist of pre-selected texts to aid their top-down processing strategies?
5. Can texts be used to help promote noticing through CR tasks in known phonological, morphological and syntactical problem areas such as: the /p/ phoneme; pluralised noun phrases; indicative verbs; and articles? (Noticing need not be limited to these areas only).
6. Do writing activities allow the learners to produce work that challenge them in known linguistic problem areas?
7. Are the materials personalised to these learners by providing skills and language needed to meet learning aims?

## Cultural Needs

The concept of the culture of the classroom in EFL materials has been an important theme of this paper, and it should be reiterated that as materials developers we need to look at culture in a more nuanced way and accept that although a central part of these learners' culture is religion, their culture also includes popular culture phenomena. Criterion 11 in this section of the framework deals directly with religion and ensures that any evaluation of materials for use with Arab learners considers religious appropriacy. However, beyond religion, teenage boys in the Middle East will typically be engaged by smart technology, topics such as sport (e.g. football and World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)) and famous characters such as Sherlock Holmes or superheroes. These areas are central cultural components and form the basis of the culture of the classroom in this context. The use of such topics and technology are the key to developing intrinsic motivation, as these are areas that the learners can identify with and are familiar with. Familiarity with a topic is also vitally important to top-down processing (see Benjamin, 2015, with regard to selecting texts for use with Arab learners).

Incorporating content and methods that are part of the learners' everyday lives, for example using smart devices and technology in class, will be central to this section of the framework. Consequently, McGrath's (2002, p. 74) principles of localisation and personalisation are also helpful in developing the criteria for this section of the framework. However, for the materials to be fully personalised, they need to provide learners with relevant skills and knowledge to allow them to meet curriculum and learning aims. The principle of localisation will be broadened however, and will not be limited to the geographical location of the learners. Instead, localisation will influence the selection of topics and materials not because they are about the Middle East, but because they can tap into the unique cultural identity of a specific class of learners. The

criteria for the cultural needs of Arab learners are:

8. Do the materials contain familiar topics that can boost intrinsic motivation and comprehension? (e.g. sports and superheroes for teenage learners - this will change depending on the specific class in line with the culture of the classroom)
9. Are the materials localised to the culture of the classroom?
10. Are the materials personalised to these learners by incorporating smart technology where possible and appropriate? (For example using smart phones to interact with QR codes, see Benjamin, 2015).
11. Are the materials sensitive to the beliefs of Muslim learners?

## CLT Methodology

Owing to the increasing use of CLT in Middle Eastern classrooms it is important that materials used have a clear CLT approach and rationale running through them. These criteria aim to bring together the most important and relevant features of CLT methodologies as briefly discussed in the theoretical grounding section of this paper: namely the use of a shallow end approach. A key feature that any CLT materials should contain is taken from Tomlinson (2010, p. 10) and is that they allow learners to use language to achieve a communicative purpose. This does not necessarily mean that the materials should always incorporate a wide-ranging production activity. Certainly, writing activities will have an individualised output in the form of a piece of written work, but with reading materials there need not be this provision. For this reason, the use of pair and group work will be an important consideration so that learners can discuss their ideas with their peers and be given the chance to communicate. It is also important that there be some kind of information gap woven into the materials, especially with reading so that the principle of achieving a communicative purpose can be realised effectively. The CLT criteria which will be most applicable to reading and writing materials are:

12. Does the material lend itself to a shallow-end, inductive CLT approach by:
  - a. Presenting a preselected topic.
  - b. Providing pre-activity tasks to ready the learners.
  - c. Presenting gist or scanning tasks.
  - d. Demonstrating genre-specific examples in writing materials.
  - e. Providing opportunity for pair and group work.
  - f. Giving opportunity for a consolidation or extension activity.
13. Do the materials provide the learners with opportunities to use language for communicative purposes?

14. Do the materials offer examples of known linguistic problem areas that can be pre-taught and consolidated through noticing?
15. Do the materials offer opportunities for information gap activities in reading and listening sections?

## Conclusions

The framework presented in this article attempts to offer some guidance to those using materials and wishing to adapt them effectively for Middle Eastern learners and is based on my 'on the ground' experiences of teaching and using published materials in this region. This is where we need to return to Bolitho's quote at the start of this paper which stated that coursebook writers are typically isolated from the classrooms where their materials are used. As a result we need to start asking real questions about who is writing our materials and what criteria they are using to do so. The criteria in this framework are specifically targeted towards Arab learners and aim to provide a structure for culturally familiar content to be woven in to materials as discussed above in Abu-Rabia (2003) in order to assist Arab learners with top-down processing. There is also the central issue of this paper that we need to boost the intrinsic motivation of our learners by using materials that are more catered towards the culture of the classroom- an issue this framework aims to address by offering a clear evaluative framework. If those who develop materials for the Middle East can start to integrate these considerations into their work then I believe we can start to make real progress in developing materials that marry the obvious cultural concerns developers have when producing materials for the Middle East with the need to create more intrinsically motivating materials for learners in this context.

**Author's note:** The framework developed in this paper was originally created as part of my MA dissertation which also included materials that had been adapted based on this framework. These materials are available to view and download on my website at [www.instantefl.com](http://www.instantefl.com). I would be delighted to hear from anybody who cares to use these materials in class and has any feedback on their classroom application. I can be reached by email at [paulbenjamin417@gmail.com](mailto:paulbenjamin417@gmail.com).

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## Appendix 1

### The Framework for Analysing Materials for Arab Learners

Criterion	Consideration
1.	Does the material provide opportunity for the learners to read or interact with a text that demonstrates relevant features of genre in an authentic manner? (Texts should ideally be graded at a level that learners can understand but are also challenging in line with Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (1981)).
2.	Does the material provide opportunity for the learners to produce an extended piece of original writing?
3.	Do comprehension questions focus the learners' attention on the key points of the text?
4.	Are pre-reading activities provided which allow learners to glean the gist of pre-selected texts to aid their top-down processing strategies?
5.	Can texts be used to help promote noticing through CR tasks in known phonological, morphological and syntactical problem areas such as: the /p/ phoneme; pluralised noun phrases; indicative verbs; and articles? (Noticing need not be limited to these areas only).
6.	Do writing activities allow the learners to produce work that challenge them in known linguistic problem areas?
7.	Are the materials personalised to these learners by providing skills and language needed to meet learning aims?
8.	Do the materials contain familiar topics that can boost intrinsic motivation and comprehension? (e.g. sports and superheroes for teenage learners - this will change depending on the specific class in line with the culture of the classroom).
9.	Are the materials localised to the culture of the classroom?
10.	Are the materials personalised to these learners by incorporating smart technology where possible and appropriate? (For example using smart phones to interact with QR codes, see Benjamin, 2015).
11.	Are the materials sensitive to the beliefs of Muslim learners?
12.	Does the material lend itself to a shallow-end, inductive CLT approach by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. Presenting a preselected topic.</li> <li>h. Providing pre-activity tasks to ready the learners.</li> <li>i. Presenting gist or scanning tasks.</li> <li>j. Demonstrating genre-specific examples in writing materials.</li> <li>k. Providing opportunity for pair and group work.</li> <li>l. Giving opportunity for a consolidation or extension activity.</li> </ol>
13.	Do the materials provide the learners with opportunities to use language for communicative purposes?
14.	Do the materials offer examples of known linguistic problem areas that can be pre-taught and consolidated through noticing?
15.	Do the materials offer opportunities for information gap activities in reading and listening sections?

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## BOOK REVIEW

## Creativity in the English Language Classroom

A. Maley and N. Peachey (Eds.)

British Council 2015, 180pp.

ISBN 978 0863557675

Available free online:

<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/books-resource-packs/creativity-english-language-classroom>

Reviewed by David Brennan

Alan Maley in his introductory chapter to this large volume (eighteen chapters in total) of collected papers on the subject of creativity, immediately sets the tone for what follows by opting to not do what is usually done in an introduction i.e. summarise what is to come. Instead he offers to follow 'common threads' running through the book which lead on to his definition of and ideas on creativity, why he believes it is important in language teaching and finally to suggestions of generic ideas to stimulate creativity in the classroom.

Indeed what follows this introduction are 18 chapters which are all structured in a similar fashion: ideas on what creativity is, how important it is, and how the current educational setup is often constructed in a way which fundamentally conflicts with the factors necessary for creativity. Lastly and most significantly each chapter provides practical activities ranging from introductory warm-ups to full lessons which are all outlined in an easy to follow step-by-step fashion. Is 18 chapters too many? Are not the chapters repeating the same thing? These are questions which can only be answered by reading the book for oneself but considering that there were over 200 proposals, from which the 18 were chosen it would seem there are a lot of teachers out there with a lot to say on this subject.

The editors, Alan Maley and Nik Peachey, state their aim in producing this volume is to demonstrate that 'creativity isn't something which is reserved for a specific part of a course or a lesson, but that it is something which can and should be integrated into every aspect of our classroom practice and at every level of our learners experience' (p.4). Chapters cover a wide spectrum of levels and learners – from young learners, through secondary school, to adult and tertiary environments and offer a worldwide perspective from Brazil and Vietnam to Greece and Bulgaria, focusing on aspects such as learner creativity, teacher creativity and how creativity can be optimized in materials development and teacher training courses.

The importance of creativity in education has been recognized since the 1950's when Benjamin Bloom came up with his famous taxonomy of higher order thinking skills. The revised version (Anderson and Krathwohl 2000) places creativity at the pinnacle of higher order thinking skills. Despite its supposed recognized importance, Robinson's (1998) British government-commissioned inquiry found that a prescriptive education system was stifling the creativity of teachers and their pupils. As a result of this study and the growing industry-led interest and demand for creative workers, ministries of education in different parts of the world have encouraged schools to focus more on creativity in the curriculum across all subject areas – something that is believed to have widespread consequences.

In terms of the contributors, the book practices what it preaches, in that the contributions range from those with many years experience and previous publication to those who are just beginning, demonstrating that creativity in the classroom 'isn't limited to the *gifted* and *talented* but is something that any teacher can try to apply' (p.4).

Reviewing an edited volume of papers with 18 chapters poses some difficult problems. Due to the limitations of the length of the review it is impossible to review each chapter in detail. Certain book reviews e.g. McGrath's (2013) review of Harwood's 2010 book on ELT materials (ELTJ 67/1) and Prowse's (2015) review of Harwood's 2014 book on this topic in Folio 16/2 offer a practical solution to these considerations. Both authors summarize the contents, elucidate certain points and move in to focus on certain chapters which appeal to them. This reviewer will in general follow these examples.

Perhaps it is borderline blasphemy to use a cliché when describing a book on creativity – but this book is a breathe of fresh air. The style of all the chapters is written in language which is suitably semi-academic/semi-informal, resulting in it being suitably readable. Perhaps the intended audience being the average on the ground English teacher as much as the more

academically inclined contributed to this welcome tone. What we have in essence is a book which serves up suggestions; on what creativity is, what it means in language learning and most importantly how you, the teacher, can implement games, activities, lessons, to help students engage their creative potential and to make language acquisition more fun and natural.

The interestingly titled opening chapter, *Medium: companion or slave* by Andrew Wright demonstrates the idea that creativity is ubiquitous – all that is required is the ability to see it. By 'everywhere', Wright means the classroom, the school, the students, the teachers, the neighbourhood and all things contained within. For example he starts out by looking at the teacher as a resource, which he further reduces to voice, body and life experiences. Although he acknowledges that some teachers in some contexts might be reticent about sharing stories he argues that doing so 'can be extremely powerful and can lead to students being willing to reciprocate' and it can lead to language being 'meaningful and memorable' (p.16). He goes on to demonstrate how poetry, drama and songs, can be used in conjunction with the surrounding environment to involve the students in meaningful and practical ways. All activities require almost no resources and little planning. This is an excellent chapter to open the book with and clearly demonstrates the ideas and concepts Maley played with in the introduction; namely creativity is all around us and we are all capable (to varying degrees) of tapping into it or as Wright puts it 'openness to potential is a fundamental characteristic of creativity' so it is up to us teachers to see our medium as either companion or slave.

Chapter 13, *The learner as a creativity resource*, by Marjorie Rosenberg, offers further activities to develop these themes, and Chapter 15, *Fostering learners voices in literature classes in an Asian context* by Phuong thi Anh Le looks at how American literature is used to promote creative expression and language development in university students in Vietnam.

The content of Chapter 2, *Challenging teachers to use their coursebooks more creatively*, by Brian Tomlinson examines, as the title suggests, existing coursebooks and how the activities therein can be made more creative. Opening up closed activities is one of the main themes of this chapter as well as *readiness activities* which get students to think about their own experiences so as to ready themselves for what they are going to be asked. Also examined are *Discovery activities* which help students discover things for themselves about language features highlighted in their coursebooks. Tomlinson describes a coursebook adaptation workshop in Bogata and pre-workshop and post-workshop adaptation activities, the results of which suggest that once made aware of the possibilities of adaptation teachers will be much more open to it. In the pre-workshop teachers came up with 3.5 adaptations per pair while the post workshop

teachers came up with 5.5 per pair on average.

Although Chapter 3, *Seven pillars of creativity in primary education*, by Carol Read is aimed at teaching children, these seven pillars could as easily be used to inspired creativity in students of all ages. These pillars are given as follows:

1. Build up positive self-esteem
2. Model creativity yourself
3. Offer children choice
4. Use questions effectively
5. Make connections
6. Explore ideas
7. Encourage critical reflection (p.30).

Chapter 11, by Malu Sciamarelli, returns to the realm of creativity in children's education and specifically to mascot-inspired projects. Chapter 4, by Chrysa Papalazarou, *Making thinking visible in the classroom: nurturing a creative mindset*, examines using visualization and art to affectively and cognitively engage students while Chapter 5, by David Heathfield, examines personal and creative story telling. Both chapters 4 and 5 are full of useful activities and informative insights. Heathfield again emphasizes what was touched upon in Chapter 1 i.e. our students' life stories are our richest resource. Chapter 14, *Practicing creative writing in high school foreign language classes*, by Peter Lutzker, again offers more activities to promote creative writing as does Chapter 17, *Drama and creative writing: a blended tool*, by Victoria Hlendschi-Stroie.

Traditionalists, grammarians and those in general skeptical about creative approaches should warm to this book after reading Chapter 6, *Teaching grammar creatively*, by Jill and Charlie Hadfield, which appears to conflict with the common view that grammar and creativity are somehow incompatible.

Chapters 7, *From everyday activities to creative tasks*, by Judit Fehér and 8, *Fostering and building upon oral creativity in the EFL classroom*, by Jürgen Kurtz, prove to be, in this reviewer's estimation, two of the most interesting chapters in the volume. In Chapter 7, Fehér takes everyday familiar activities across the four skills and shows how they can be adapted and how these adaptations lead to increased motivation and autonomy. Again, as with each chapter, the benefits of creative engagement are emphasized: 'Through their creativity and the freedom creative thinking gives to them, students get involved more deeply and in more ways than with activities that do not call for the use of their creativity' (p.72).

Kurtz in Chapter 8 claims that in many foreign language classrooms around the world there is often little room for learners to voice their own thoughts and ideas and, furthermore, experiment with the target language in meaningful contexts and ways.

Kurtz encourages improvisation, risk-taking, changing routines. Here the teacher must lead the way and become what he refers to as the *sage on the stage* rather than the *guide on the side*. As with all chapters in this book, activities are provided to back up the theoretical foundations. The following quote sums up precisely the dynamics necessary for creativity to exist: 'Ultimately, however, creativity will only flourish if teachers break old patterns and embrace spontaneity and unpredictability as essential parts of everyday classroom interaction' (p.83).

Chapter 9, *Old wine in new bottles: solving language problems creatively*, by Kathleen Bailey and Anita Krshnan, again returns to themes touched upon in Chapter one with a focus on under-resourced areas and how teachers working in these areas have come up with ingenious and inexpensive materials to engage students creatively, while Chapter 10, by Libor Stepanek, focuses on how students who produce creative work should be recognized, encouraged and rewarded. Stepanek also encourages the use of student-generated sources. Perhaps the materials we as teacher choose are often not as interesting to the students as we think and by allowing them to select their own material we not only overcome this problem but also promote student autonomy and cater for individual learner styles.

Chapter 12, *Creating creative teachers*, by Marisa Constantinides, is a stand-out chapter and brings attention to the serious neglect of creativity as a required asset for teachers entering the ELT world. Neither CELTA nor DELTA programmes include creativity in any way in their courses. A recent survey of CELTA and DELTA trainers (Constantinides 2014) revealed the majority of trainers do believe it is important. Constantinides outlines numerous problems which may occur if teachers do not embrace creative thinking. She then outlines practical suggestions and activities for teacher trainers who are working with teachers on training courses. In one activity she describes, teachers are asked to state a problem (e.g. 'My students don't do their homework') and take on different roles to discuss the situation – parents, directors of studies and so on. Another example used is 'Balloon' debates where it is decided who stays in the balloon based on their proposed approach or method.

If by this stage you have any preconceptions left about creativity and creative people, Chapter 16, *A framework for learning creatively*, by Tessa Woodward, will reinforce one of the recurring themes of this book; creativity is for everybody. This chapter provides activities to stimulate an atmosphere of creativity in the classroom.

Finally Chapter 18, by Zarina Markova, presents the findings of a case study of three primary schools in Bulgaria which concludes that in this case creativity did not come easily to the students; there was unwillingness to experiment, lack of confidence to take risks and tolerate ambiguities. The teachers had

to spend time to draw them out and gradually the students gained confidence and began to engage more 'enthusiastically and imaginatively in the activities' (p.172) which resulted in more signs of appreciation of their English lessons and their teachers who were in turn stimulated to introduce more creative activities into their teaching.

Although enjoyable and enlightening, there is often considerable overlap between the chapters. Each chapter begins with the importance and a definition of creativity, which unfortunately is very difficult to define leading to 18 different opinions which are all in essence similar. In addition it might have been a good idea to group certain chapters into sections, for example a section on children's learning, under-resourced areas and so on, making it easier for the reader who is searching for a specialized area.

This book does not claim that creativity is a panacea for the woes of educationalists and teachers the world over; simply it highlights the importance and effectiveness of creativity and how this is often overlooked. Most importantly however this is a practical and potent book for teachers looking to develop their skills. This long overdue book has something for everyone involved in the field, new and experienced teachers, teacher trainers, school managers, materials developers and academics.

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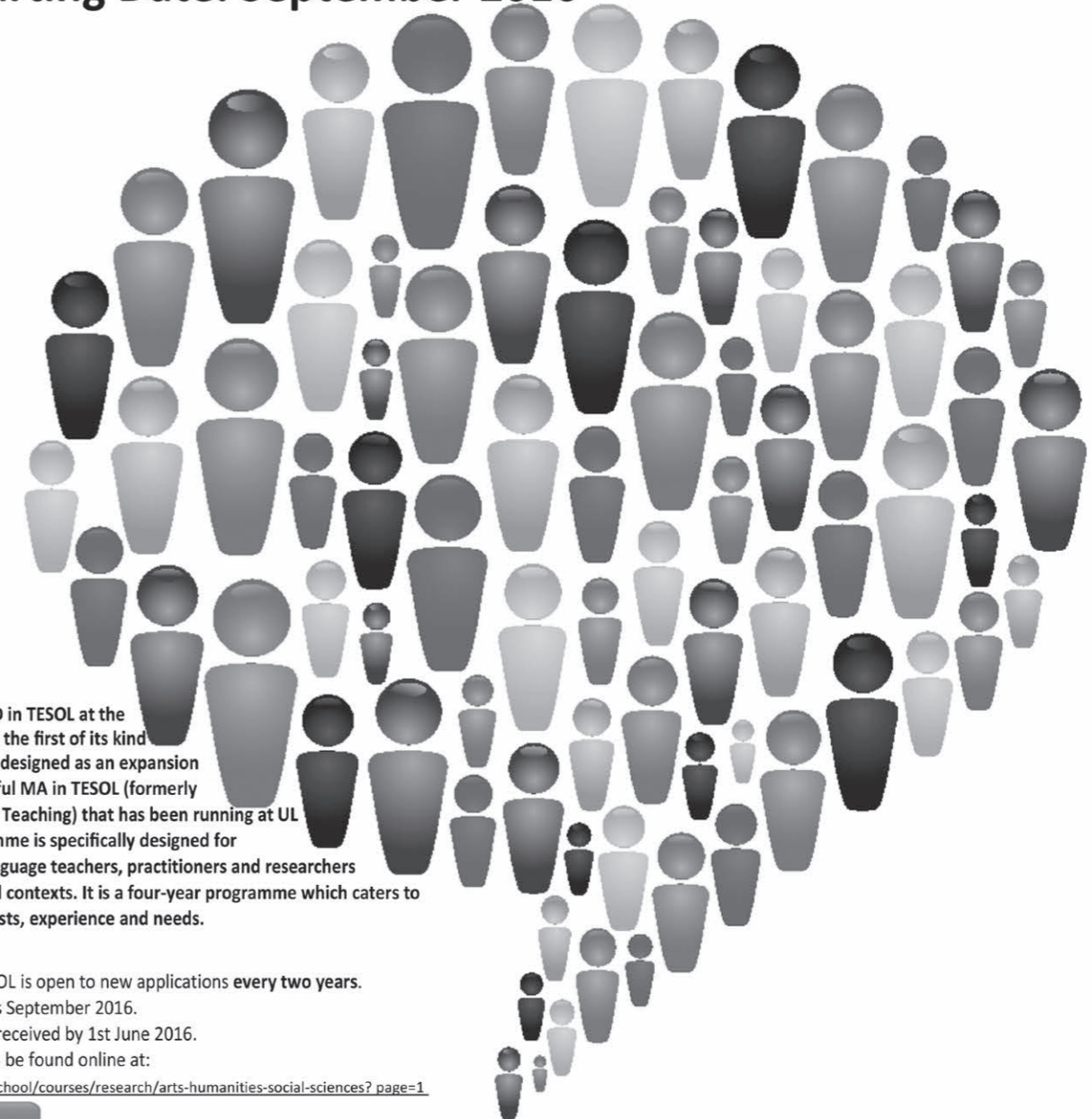
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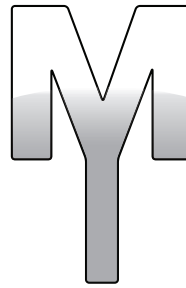
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