Readings on ELT Material

director Jayakaran Mukundan
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PREFACE | Learning by Experiencing: Effectuating Changes in EAP Materials Development  
*Shameem Rafik-Galea & Martin Cortazzi* | vii  |
| CHAPTER 1 | Inputs, Processes and Outcomes in Materials Development: Extending the Range  
*Alan Maley* | 1    |
| CHAPTER 3 | Course Materials for Diplomats: Essential Guidelines  
*Hafriza Burhanudeen* | 32   |
| CHAPTER 4 | Graded Readers – Issues for Authors  
*Rob Waring* | 45   |
| CHAPTER 5 | The Development of a Composite Framework for Textbook Evaluation  
*Jayakaran Mukundan* | 61   |
| CHAPTER 6 | A ‘Bell-jar’ Consensus-reached Set of Universal Characteristics of ELT Textbooks  
*Hasan Ansary & Esmat Babaii* | 69   |
| CHAPTER 7 | Gender—The Missing Factor in the Selection of Materials  
*Teh Chee Seng* | 84   |
| CHAPTER 8 | Gender Bias in Malaysian English Language Textbooks  
*Sanda Kumari Chandran & Mardezieh Hayati Abdullah* | 91   |
| CHAPTER 9 | Lessons from Within: The Use of Human Resources in Developing Materials for Teaching Writing  
*Tan Bee Tin* | 102  |
Chapter 11
Infusion of Thinking Skills in Classroom Materials

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental characteristics of “thinking pedagogy” is that teachers are encouraged to understand the thinking of each of their students and then use that knowledge in instructional planning. A typical pedagogy of 25 years ago i.e. explanation and demonstration by the teacher is relatively less important and using questions to probe students’ thinking is relatively more important.

The implication of this shift is that teachers have the burden of making sense of what students say in their explanations of their thinking. Making sense requires understanding not only the relevant pedagogy in teaching thinking that might underlie an explanation but also the trajectory of development of students’ understanding. Understanding each student’s development becomes a critical focus of a teacher’s attention.

Role of the Teacher

Teachers, in the classroom, learn to assess their students’ thinking and then they use that knowledge to plan instruction. Learning as development seems critical if teachers are going to help students increase the level of sophistication of their thinking. Teachers need to have both a vision of what level of sophistication they want students to attain and a sense of where each student is along the path toward that vision. In addition, teachers need to be thinking about how to organize instruction so that students move in the direction of the desired goals.

Reflective abstraction is important as a mechanism by which teachers can improve their instruction. It is also important for students, in the sense that the students must reflect on their own development. Thus, teachers have to reflect on their own work and to help students reflect on their thinking.
At primary level, there would seem to be a special obligation to help students develop the skills necessary for reflection; for example, through listening to their peers explain solutions, learning to ask questions to clarify those presentations of solutions, and keeping written records of their solutions that can form data for reflection.

The teacher is the intermediary factor, able to provide proper support and guide students through reading, which is essential for students with low proficiency. As such, teachers need to be able to select suitable teaching materials at each level according to their students' interests. With the chosen classroom materials, the teacher needs to strategize and also use an approach that could effectively broaden the minds of students.

The role of the teacher is crucial in encouraging the discussions, and the habits of listening and reflecting and knowing when to intervene. It is essential that teachers have some background knowledge to the materials selected for use in the classroom in order to be confident in helping pupils to explore questions.

Integration of Thinking Skills in the Malaysian Schools

As we step into the new millennium and the implementation of SMART schools being widely done and publicised throughout the nation, Thinking Skills (TS) should be very much highlighted because students need to be equipped so as to be more independent, confident, and self-reliable. While the Multi-Super-Corridor (MSC) is taking shape and global education is slowly dominating in this borderless society, TS is surely an indispensable element and also an important phase in our education system.

The goal of developing thinking abilities among students is not a new phenomenon. Renewed attention is being directed towards accomplishing our educational objectives. Although the call to integrate thinking skills is widely talked about, primary and secondary teachers are often hard pressed to find practical solutions to the problem of integrating the teaching of thinking skills in their daily lessons.

What is Thinking?

Thinking is a mental process and the skills include the intellectual skills such as memorising and recalling facts and information, clarifying, making analysis, generating ideas, making decisions, problem solving and planning.

Different authors of thinking skills have proposed different models and approaches in teaching thinking skills depending on the aims of using them. According to Ruzzierio (1984), “Thinking is any mental activity that helps formulate or solve a problem, make a decision or fulfil a desire to understand.” John Baued (1991) defines thinking as a search for meaning and understanding that can involve the adventurous generation of options, the attempt to arrive at logical, reasonable judgments and reflection on the process. Edward de Bono (1976) mentions that thinking is a deliberate exploration of experience for a purpose and the purpose is understanding, decision-making, problem-solving, judgment, action and so on. We should compare and contrast them and decide which would be the most suitable to suit our needs. We may need to go a step further in devising and designing.

Infusion of Thinking Skills in the Classroom Materials | 129
our own model or approach of selecting materials for teaching thinking skills in the classroom.

**Critical and Creative Thinking Skills: Some Definitions**

Critical thinking skills are the skills required to make a skilful assessment of the data and information received. This involves making a skilful analysis of the data and information. Making an analysis means breaking up the data and information into parts and studying each part in more detail. Skilful analysis involves the skills of comparing and contrasting, classifying, arranging and sequencing, identifying facts and opinions, identifying bias statements, giving the causes, predicting, making inferences and generalisations, interpreting and summarising.

Creative thinking skills are the skills of generating many, varied and new ideas. Skills involved in making inventions and innovations are considered as creative thinking skills. Table 1 shows a summary of critical and creative thinking skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Creative Thinking</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare and Contrast</td>
<td>Generate Ideas (new, unusual, provocative, challenging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorise</td>
<td>Invent Analogies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predict</td>
<td>Invent Metaphors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make Assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make Inferences</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thinking skills that should be taught and mastered by students in schools include the following:

1. Making associations or connections
2. Comparing and contrasting
3. Classifying, grouping, categorising
4. Evaluating
5. Arranging and sequencing
6. Identifying true or false statements
7. Identifying facts and opinion
8. Identifying bias statements
9. Identifying and giving the causes
10. Identifying the effect / consequences, predicting consequences
11. Making inferences or conclusions
12. Making generalisations
13. Making interpretations
14. Identifying the main ideas, supporting ideas, details
15. Making summaries
16. Making decisions
17. Solving problems
This book is the first in a series of ELT materials. Books such as these are published especially for postgraduate students either doing courses on ELT materials or writing their theses on some aspect of materials. Students regard the publication of materials such as these as invaluable and an immense contribution to ideas generation for research and of course as a contribution to support the review of literature expected of them in their research. Much hard work has gone into the production of such books, and researchers and teachers have to thank people like Brian Tomlinson for putting together such works on ELT materials. This present work is intended to add to the literature on ELT materials. As it originates from Malaysia and a Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) environment, it would have voices not very frequently heard from the more established developed world sources. Although most of the writers are based in Malaysia, this book has contributions from the UK, Iran, Japan and Thailand.