TSL3111 Developing and Using Resources for the Primary ESL Classroom

Topic 1: Teaching and Learning Materials for the Classroom

Ruth Wickham, Brighton Education Training Fellow, IPGKDRI

Student's Notes

Contents

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The old-fashioned idea of 'teaching' involved the teacher at the front of the classroom talking to the students. In the popular movie "School of Rock", Jack Black who is pretending to be a teacher stands in front of the class and says, "Teach, teach, teach ..." The idea that teaching=talking is a common misconception even nowadays.

Another very old idea about teaching involves the "Eye gate" and the "Ear gate" into the mind. This suggests that there are two important ways to feed information into the student's brain, through the eyes and through the ears.

- Visual = eye gate
- Audio = ear gate

The idea is that if both entry points are involved, the student is more likely to remember what is taught.

However, we should not be limited to the two senses of seeing and hearing, when we all have five senses. We also have a 'gate' through our sense of touch, and taste, and smell. And if movement is added to learning then retention is increased even more.

Types of Materials

The most common (and useful) materials for showing learners what they need to learn are as mentioned above:

- Audio – something to listen to
- Visual – something to look at

And if both elements are included, then that's even better.

With modern ICT there are also interactive materials – children look and listen and click or move a mouse to interact with the learning materials.

However, even old-fashioned materials – books, worksheets, games, the board – can be interactive and contain not only the 'visual' element, but also involve use of the other senses as well as movement.

Purpose of Materials

There are materials which have the purpose of presenting content. However, especially with language learning, that is only the 'teaching' side of 'teaching and learning'. For the 'learning' part to happen we need materials which the children interact with, and which facilitate them interacting with others.

Read this passage from Jeremy Harmer's book "The Practice of English Language Teaching" in the chapter on "Educational technology and other learning resources", and answer the questions.

The technology pyramid

(Harmer, 2007, pp. 175-6)

If you walk into some classrooms around the world, you will see fixed data projectors, interactive whiteboards (IWBs), built-in speakers for audio material that is delivered directly from a computer hard disk (rather than from a tape recorder), and computers with round-the-clock Internet access, Whenever teachers want their students to find anything out, they can get them to use a search engine like Google and the results can be shown to the whole class on the IWB.

In other classes, even in many successful private language schools around the world, there is a whiteboard in the classroom, an overhead projector (OHP) and a tape recorder. Other schools only have a whiteboard - or perhaps a blackboard - often not in very good condition. In such schools there may well not be a photocopier, though hopefully the students will have exercise books.

Finally, there are some classroom situations where neither teacher nor students have anything at all in terms of educational technology or other learning aids. Jill and Charles Hadfield represent these differing realities in a 'reversed pyramid' of resources (see Figure 1). in a world in which the pace of technological change is breathtakingly fast (so that between the writing and publishing of this book new technology will have been produced that most of us are as yet unaware of), it seems that being at the bottom of the pyramid is likely to be a bar to language learning.

Language laboratories, videos, computers, PowerPoint

Cassette recorders, OHPs, photocopiers

Whiteboards, books

Paper and pens

Blackboard
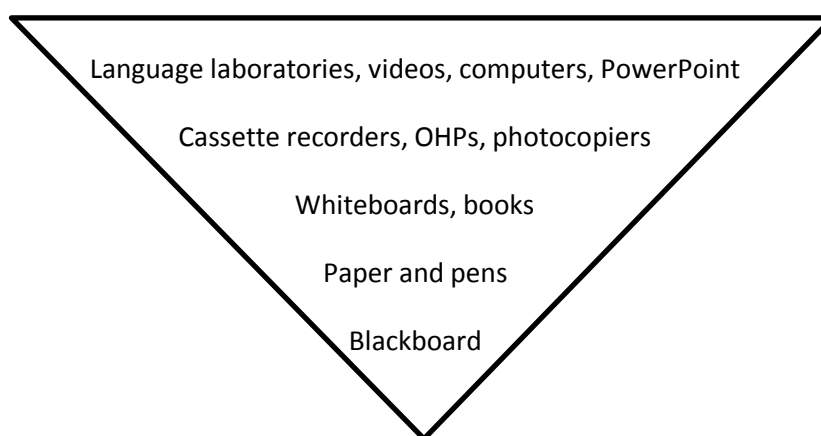
FIGURE 1: Reversed resources pyramid

However, Jill and Charles Hadfield argue passionately, this is not the case (Hadfield and Hadfield 2003a and b). There is a lot you can do with minimal or even no resources. For example, in one situation they taught in, there was a board and the children had exercise books, but apart from that there were no other educational aids, not even coursebooks. However, with the help of a washing line and clothes pegs they were able to hang up pictures for students to work with. Simple objects like a selection of pebbles became the focus for activities such as telling the story of the pebbles' existence; different words from sentences were written on pieces of paper or card and then put on

students' backs - and the rest of the class had to make them stand in order to make a sentence from the word; paper bags (with faces drawn on them) became puppets; the classroom desks were rearranged to become a street plan so students could practise giving (and responding to) directions. Finally, and most importantly, the students themselves were used as source material, whether as participants in quizzes about the real world, as informants in discussions about families or as imaginers of river scenes based on teacher description. The internal world of the student is 'the richest, deepest seam of gold that you have' (Hadfield and Hadfield 2003b: 34). Indeed, (see Figure 2) Jill and Charles Hadfield propose turning the pyramid the other way up.

The resources that are currently available are truly amazing. As we shall see, they offer an amazing variety of routes for learning and discovery. Yet we should not see them as methodologies for learning, but rather as tools to help us in whatever approaches and techniques we have chosen to use. And we need to remind ourselves constantly of the fact that many classrooms both in the 'developing' and 'developed' world do not have access to very modern technology. Yet this does not prevent students - and has never prevented them - from learning English successfully. In this chapter, therefore, we will look at a range of classroom resources (both hi- and low-tech) before considering the questions we need to ask when trying to decide whether to adopt the latest technological innovation.

People

Real life

Blackboard

Paper and pens

Whiteboards, books

Cassette recorders, OHPs, photocopiers

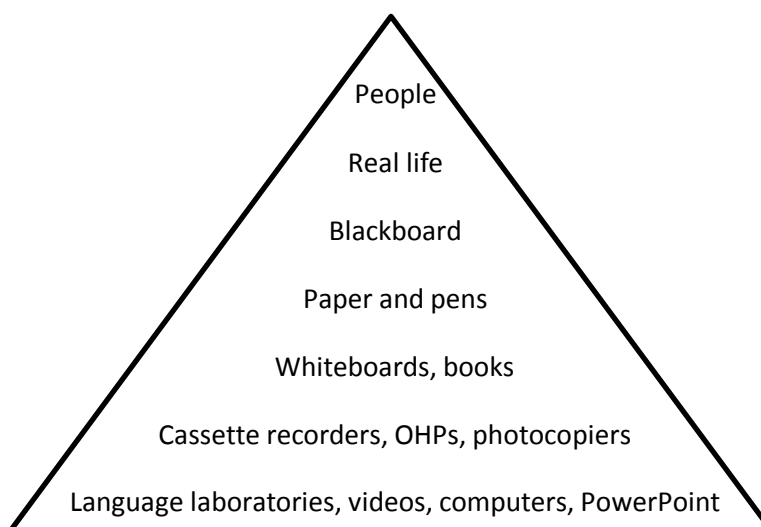Language laboratories, videos, computers, PowerPoint

FIGURE 2: 'Other way up' resources pyramid

The **questions** below are designed to help you to read through and pick up the main points in the article.

Questions for 'The Technology Pyramid':

1. What might you find in a classroom with advanced technology?

....

....

....

....

2. In classrooms at the 'point' of the reversed pyramid, what do students and teachers have?

....

3. Is a lack of technology necessarily 'a bar to language learning? (Why / why not?)

....

Give five examples (of your own or from the text) of how you can manage without technology:

- ....

- ....

- ....

- ....

- ....

4. What is the 'richest, deepest seam of gold' that will allow you to turn 'the pyramid the other way up'? ....

5. Give 3 examples (of your own or from the text above) of something in 'the internal world of the student' that can be used as a resource:

- ....

- ....

- ....

Discuss your answers with your group.

Using Technological Equipment

Fill in the table, and then discuss with your group.

Which of the technological equipment mentioned in the article have you see in classrooms? What would you add to the list? What was each one for?

Technology Type	Seen	Used	Use / Purpose
Blackboard			
Whiteboard			
Flipchart			
LCD projector			
Overhead Projector			
Interactive whiteboard			
Built in speakers			
Cassette player/recorder			
Language Laboratory			
Computer with Internet			
TV			
Photocopier			
Flash Cards			
Set of text books			
Library Corner			
Art materials			

Would you rather teach in a fully-equipped classroom, or one with the 'bare essentials'? Why?

....

....

When you were at school, how well equipped were your classrooms? What effect did this have?

....

....

Strengths and weaknesses of learning materials

In order to decide on the strengths and weakness of various materials, we need to be able to classify them and to know what we are talking about.

There are many ways to classify types of learning materials, such as by the materials they are made of, or the way they are used, or the skills they address, how modern they are, or even how expensive they are to acquire.

Discuss in your group the materials mentioned above and any others you are familiar with or have heard of, and decide on a system of classifying them beyond just "audio" and "visual".

Here is one example of a way to classify materials:

Personal materials that the teacher carries with them – their voice, facial expression, gestures. This could extend to the teacher dressing in special ways for specific circumstances (such as telling a story or teaching vocabulary).

There are **Environmental** materials that exist in the immediate (classroom) environment – the students, their clothing, the furniture, other objects in the room, objects visible from the room through the windows or door.

There are **Traditional** materials for teaching such as pens and pencils, paper, rulers, board, chalk or markers, and exercise or note books.

There are **Published** materials such as textbooks, course books, readers, reference books (dictionary, thesaurus) and grammar books.

There are **Customised** classroom materials such as flash cards, and work sheets.

There is **Computerised** equipment such as computers, printers, scanners, LCD projector, and interactive whiteboards.

There are **Online** resources such as information sites, games sites, video and story sites.

Now list types of materials, their purpose, and their strengths and weaknesses.

Type	Purpose	Strengths and Weaknesses

Works cited in this topic

Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching.* Pearson Longman.