Book review: Materials Development in Language Teaching

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Tomlinson, B. (Ed) (1998) Materials Development in Language Teaching. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press

This book is about the development of materials for language teaching. The book is divided in four parts. In each of these parts there are articles written by different authors, some of them are Gwyneth Fox, Jane Willis, Michael McCarthy, Rod Bolitho, el mismo Tomlinson, Andrew Little John, Alan Maley and Julian Edge.

Part A

At the beginning of the book, there is an excellent glossary for professionals of language teaching focused on the development of materials. The first part is named "Data collection and materials development". En this section, there are three interesting articles; the first one is about the use of corpus in the classroom. The author states the possibility to analyze large amounts of language so that a corpus can be built allowing researchers to analyze the way language is being used nowadays. It is through these studies that we can determine the type of language that should be included in the material one is going to design. In this first article, it is exemplified the way a corpus support decision making to design materials works. Teachers are also invited to employ *concordancers* in the classroom for the students to analyze the way the langue is used. Another article in this section, concentrates on the use c*oncordancers* without computers in the classroom. The importance of such resources to describe grammar and the lexicon is highlighted. In addition, it provides teachers with guidance to design materials using such technique (*concordances*). It also shows how to obtain these *concordancers.* This document tries to demonstrate that there is no need of a sophisticated tool to use this technique. The third article of part A refers to the use of corpus to learn English grammar, especially patterns. The authors suggest the study of grammar based on discourse, specially the spoken language.

Part B

The second part, part B, is about the process of materials design. In the first section of this part there is a framework to design materials which includes several

processes (steps). The first of these processes is the identification of needs about the materials; the second is the linguistic exploration in a particular area. The third is the contextual realization; this refers to the finding of ideas that are appropriate for the context or for the text books people are used to work with. The forth process is the pedagogical realization of the materials; this is the different options and the actual activities. The last step is the physical production of the materials where different things have to be considered such as: the presentation, the size, the visual aspects, the reproduction and the extension. Other steps which are not directly related to the material design are also included, very important though. They are related to the use and evaluation of the materials. This section is important for all those who design materials because it shows a clear methodological framework to design quality products.

The next section in part B is about the commitment that designing materials implies for the world. This article includes information about how to design text books which are produced by publishers with a global vision hoping they can be adapted to diverse situations in the World. In this article, the author suggests to follow some guidelines such as the flexibility of the test, the language, the content, the natural language, the approaches, the emphasis about the revision, the personalized practice of the integration of skills, the balance of the approaches, the development of the student and the professional respect. It is also analyzed the commitment and the role of the publishers, the schools and institutions, the teachers and the students.

The last article of this section tells us about the testimonies of the authors of different materials. They talk about the creative process that implies the design of materials and also about the implications of team work, working with publishers, designers, technology and length time to design materials.

Part C

The third part of the book is about the process of evaluation of materials. The first article is about piloting materials. It begins with the implications of piloting materials and continues listing the factors that determine what is going to be piloted. It also shows the benefits piloting brings and the way it should be carried out. In the article there are formats that have been used by some publishers to carry out the piloting.

Another article is about the analysis of the teaching materials. In this article, the author presents a framework to analyze materials. There are ideas and examples to study the materials and forms to relate the results to our own context. This section is outstanding to know the materials that will be used in an institution or class.

The next article in part C is about the evaluation of communicative tasks. Rod Ellis talks about the micro and macro evaluation. First, he makes us reflect on the types of evaluation we must carry out and on different dimensions such as the approach, the purpose, the emphasis, the scope, the evaluators, the time, and the type of information needed to evaluate the materials. He also provides us with a very clear pedagogical explanation of what is a task in language teaching and the stages to implement and evaluate one.

The last document in this part is about text books. The author presents an interesting idea of the needs of the different actors of the teaching- learning process, emphasizing those of the teachers. This part C is very useful for the professionals of language teaching who want to be updated in the evaluation of resources.

Part D

The forth part of the book, part D, is called "Ideas for materials development". The first article is about how to help the second language readers visualize. The author presents activities of visualization such as drawings, connection activities, illustrations and mimicry. This type of activities helps students improve their reading comprehension in an unconscious way. The next article by Alan Maley presents a series of proposals to develop materials. The author explains the relationships among, teachers, materials and students. He discusses the factors that intervene in these relationships; for example, he says that some of the factors that can affect the situation regarding the teachers are the level of language and confidence they handle, their previous learning experiences, their personality and their preferred teaching style. Maley also provides us with ideas to adapt materials because he considers this is imperative. Some of these ideas are: omission, division, reduction, extension, modification, reordering and rewriting. In addition, he shows us how to design our own materials with ideas such as projects, drama techniques, cut and paste and to design modules to develop the language skills. This author presents

Prabhu's classification of materials which consists of two categories, the semi-materials and meta-materials. The first ones refer to isolated activities such as activities for listening comprehension or vocabulary, a selection of visual, oral or written texts. The second type of materials, the meta-materials, are pedagogical procedures where the teacher decides on the content and order. This section is interesting for those who produce materials for their classes and who do not base their teaching on a text book only or who prefer to design their own study kit.

The next section of part D presents the development of materials including the teacher development and the autonomy of the students. The authors say that this situation has very much in common because it refers to the selection and distribution of responsibility. Students must develop self-study skills and teachers must improve their skills for their practicum which must be reflexive and responsible. The authors discuss whether the text books support or hinder this students' autonomy or teachers' development. They also talk about the beliefs and position that text books bring to the class. They explain that materials are communication mass media that allow the author to dialogue with the receptor. To achieve the expected teachers' development, text books must provide teachers: with relevant additional materials that can be used when there is enough time, with extra materials for fast students, with enough choices that help them prepare appropriate lessons, and with materials that allow them to revise the contents of the course. To support students' autonomous learning, text books must provide students with choices. These authors emphasize the idea of providing enough options for teachers to develop and for students to work independently.

In the article 14, the author discusses Lozanov's proposals and methodology called *Suggestopedia*. He presents an example of the cycle of a lesson and explains how the language and the grammar are taught under this methodology. In the last article of this part of the book, Tomlinson talks about the design of self-access materials. He presents some principles that have to be followed to develop activities of self-access, and describes the characteristics of this type of materials.

To conclude, this book shows a wide range of ideas, procedures and guidelines to develop materials that support language learning and teaching. This book is a great

source for language teachers and for teacher trainers and their trainees when using and designing materials for different educational levels.