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ENCOURAGING LEARNERS TO CREATE LANGUAGE-LEARNING MATERIALS

Аннотация*: в данной статье рассматривается обучающий потенциал учебных материалов, созданных обучающимися, а также методы активизации их творческой деятельности по созданию собственных учебных материалов. Описываются приёмы организации деятельности обучающихся, направленной на создание учебных ресурсов.*

Ключевые слова*: творчество, формирующее оценивание, обучающие материалы, групповое обучение.*

Abstract*: in this article, the educational value of learner-produced materials is highlighted and methods to encourage students to create materials are discussed. Some material development activities aimed at empowering learners to practice and improve their English are described.*

Keywords*: language – learning materials, collaborative learning, creativity, scaffolded feedback.*

Creating materials is an arduous job because it involves a number of challenges. A materials writer has to be creative, competent, and sensitive to his or her educational context. One might argue that most students are not ready to cope with such a heavy load; however, students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Most of them have enough creativity and imagination to deal with tasks that are not within the scope of their classroom routine.

One benefit of student-designed materials is that they contribute to peer teaching and learning. But teachers should be aware that there are other potential benefits and other types of learner-created materials. For example, developing materials might take students one step further toward better English. Materials creation as a joint endeavor helps learners enjoy one of the key components of collaborative learning: active engagement. Student-generated materials also have the potential to encourage students to become more autonomous.

Producing materials can be a face-threatening experience for students if they are not trained. Here, training means not only modeling a task for learners, but also creating an atmosphere where designing and sharing materials is a natural extension of everyday learning.

There are eight principles a teacher should follow:

1. Believe in students' creativity. If teachers have basic trust in their class, no matter how unmotivated it seems to be, they should have the courage to train students to complete difficult tasks. This does not presuppose blind trust in students' abilities: teachers have to be aware of the difficulties students face. However, students as creative individuals is of great help. To show learners that their is appreciated, teachers could, for instance, read student stories, essays, or poems to the class.

2. Set a clear goal for each activity. If teachers decide to review questions in the present simple tense, they can ask students to produce a sentence-scramble exercise including such questions. Establishing a purpose allows students to alert themselves to important information.

3. Refer students to something familiar. it is best to ask learners to develop materials similar to those they have seen in textbooks and class handouts.

4. Let students work on simple tasks first. Learners need to get into the habit of developing materials. It is desirable that they create simple exercises before doing more demanding and time-consuming tasks. For example, they can start with five-item

matching exercises and only then, after completing them, work on more complex projects.

5. Provide examples. To visualize their future creations, students should first analyze the content and structure of a similar type of material.

6. Give scaffolded feedback. Scaffolding comprises much more than giving students the right solution to a problem. Teachers lead learners toward solving a proposed problem by hinting at correct answers or giving them advice or information that will enable them to think about the problem.

7. Have students share their work. Knowing that their materials (e.g., wikis) will be evaluated by their instructor and peers motivates students to invest more effort in their work.

8. Store students' materials. Instructors should create an easily accessible database of the best materials. Having constant access to student-generated materials will help teachers not only supplement their teaching but also model materials production for future students.

I usually ask students to work in pairs because pair work gives them better chances to contribute to the final product. The two students are encouraged to share responsibility and work hard, as there is no other person to help. However, teachers might need to divide their students into groups, depending on class size or the type of activity. Working individually is also an option if teachers feel a student can cope on his or her own.

Following are three activities I have used with my elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate learners.

Activity 1: Student-Produced Text

Instructors can promote learner-centered teaching and learning by asking their students to produce reading material. First of all, student-generated texts might boost learners' motivation.

Teachers can adopt two approaches to student produced text. They can promote traditional sharing (i.e., students read and comment on their peers' essays, stories, poems, blogs, and so on). Alternatively, a learner-created text can serve as a stimulus for another activity. I am in favor of the latter approach because it is related to peer teaching: students produce materials o give their peers an opportunity to improvetheir English. One such activity allows students to enhance their writing skills by working on tory starters-the first three to five lines of an uncomplete story-produced by their peers, as in the following steps:

1. Conduct a whole-class discussion about what kinds of stories students like to read and write.

2. Explain what a story starter is. Be read to show students an example if necessary.

3. Inform learners that each of them needs to write a story starter. Emphasize that the story starters need to grab their peers' attention. If you are using story starters to help students review past simple and past progressive, for example, you could first elicit what they know about the formation and usage of these tenses. You can also assign different topics, or students can be asked to create their own scenarios. They can also come up with their own interpretations of the same topic; for instance, they can all write about a scary night (real or fictional), but any topic that fits students' interests and experiences could work. Walk around the class and provide help as needed.

4. After students finish writing, divide them into pairs. Ask them to exchange their story starters. Tell students to finish their partners' stories. You can make the activity more competitive by telling students that there is a prize for the best story.

5. If there is time, have students read their stories and, if you want, ask the class to vote on their favorite. The pair who has produced the best story can get a small prize. You could also ask students to hand in their stories and, after you read them, you can announce the winner in the next class.

Activity 2: Reading Quizzes

One thing teachers can do is ask students to write comprehension questions about a reading passage. When writing the questions, students have a chance to process the text by focusing on its main idea and details. In addition, they will learn new vocabulary. To facilitate quiz development, teachers can follow these steps:

1. Mentally, divide your class into pairs before the lesson. Then select two texts (Set A and Set B) from a review unit in the textbook you are using in order to expose students to similar content. If there are no review units, you could select two other texts. If there are 20 students, the first five pairs will get a text from Set A, and the other five will get a text from Set B.

2. Bring the texts to class. Divide students pairs and distribute the texts.

3. Encourage students to read carefully. They need to understand the text thoughly in order to write proper questions. Allow them to use dictionaries if they want.

4. After students finish reading, elicit information about two question types:

True/False and Wh- questions. Write an example of each on the board. If you are dealing with an advanced class ready to cope with a challenge, include multiple choice questions as well.

5. Inform students they need to write at least five questions (depending on the length of the passage) about the text they have read. Emphasize that they can mix different types of questions. For example, they can write two Wh-questions and three True/False questions.

6. When the questions are ready, ask students to exchange their text and questions with a pair that worked with a different text. Provide learners with enough time to read and answer their peers' questions.

7. Students exchange the questions again and check their peers' answers.

8. Allow students to give feedback to their peers. Have them sit with the pair that has answered their questions. Encourage students to refer their peers to the text while

giving feedback. The feedback could relate to the questions that were developed by one pair or to the answers given by the other pair.

Activity 5: Visuals

Creating a visual seems to lie beyond the limits of an English classroom because learners are not really producing language. However, working on a visual has a number of benefits. Students are preparing a powerful stimulus that generates feelings, reactions, and, more importantly, a desire to express thoughts in the target language. Also, some visual aids assist students in understanding what has been taught.

Visuals can also help students review. Being a loyal fan of English vocabulary, I am never able to resist the temptation to review the words my students have been learning.

Teachers using the activity for the first time are advised to consult the steps below.

1. Tell students that one way to remember the words in their vocabulary logs is called visualization. To help students understand what you mean, draw a picture of a bone and write the word *bone* inside, or use a drawing and word of your choice.

2. Divide learners into pairs. Give each pair a piece of paper and some pencils or markers. Tell learners they need to visualize ten words in their vocabulary logs. Then they can draw what they want as long as it helps them remember the words. In any case, students also need to write each word and then provide its English definition, its part of speech, and an example sentence of their own. Make sure students write new sentences and do not copy the ones already written in their logs.

3. Give students enough time to make posters. Monitor and provide support if needed. In fact, watching students work can offer invaluable insights into their creative abilities.

4. When the posters are ready, ask students to check them for spelling and grammar mistakes. Walk around and help.

5. Put the posters on the classroom walls to share your students' work with their peers and with other classes.

The amount and type of materials learners can create is extensive, and the activities described in this article are merely examples. Teachers are free to adjust them to their context.

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