ELT materials writing: common misconceptions

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Definition

materials (n. pl.)

= things needed for an activity
Types of ELT materials

• Supplementary classroom materials
• In-house materials
• Published courses
Common myths 1

- Only experts can write teaching materials
Who writes ELT materials?

• “All teachers need a grounding in materials writing”

• “The process of materials writing raises almost every issue which is important to learning to teach: the selection and grading of language, awareness of language, knowledge of learning theories, socio-cultural appropriacy; ....”

David Jolly and Rod Bolitho
Common myths - 2

• All experienced teachers can write extended teaching materials
What experience do writers need?

• substantial classroom experience
• experience of teaching at different levels
• a formal knowledge of language (how it works)
• a feel for the culture of the target group of learners
What personal qualities?

- creativity/inventiveness
- flexibility
- openness to criticism
- attention to detail
- ability to work in a team
- ability to work alone
- ‘see-it-through-ability’
Common myths - 3

• Materials produced in-house are generally preferable to published materials
# In-house materials

**PROS**
- Can be motivating for staff
- Can be team building
- Part of professional development
- Materials focus on students needs
- Materials are culturally appropriate
- Gives prestige to department or institution
- Reduces costs of purchasing books

**CONS**
- Time consuming
- Labour intensive
- Insufficient support structure (readers, editors, designers, ..)
- Lack of quality control of content
- Production quality may be poor
- Team working may be problematic
- Hidden costs of using departmental staff
• The writer(s) is (are) the most important part of a writing team
Who makes up the writing team?

- project manager
- editor(s)
- market researcher(s)
- reader(s)
- illustrator(s)
- production manager
- designer
- writer(s)
Writing/production team: possible organisational structure

- Project manager
  - Writer(s)
  - Reader(s)
- EDITOR(S)
  - Market researchers
- Production manager
  - Illustrator(s)
  - Designer(s)
  - Printer
Common myths - 5

- The more high-tech the design and production, the better
Factors in the success of materials

- address the needs of students
- interesting/relevant content
- suitable level
- clearly organised sequence
- visually attractive
- uncluttered (plenty of white space)
- colour (?)
Common myths - 6

• ELT materials have changed radically over the years.
Study of current EFL course books

• Language theme
  – presentation
  – analysis
  – practice

• 4 skills work (plus additional language points)

Waters, A. 2007, IATEFL paper, Aberdeen
Very similar to ...

PPP
Presentation, Practice, Production
What format should materials take?
Basic format
Input-output model
(Hutchinson and Waters)
Common myths

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Conclusions for materials writers

• focus on a particular language point or sub-skill – e.g. an area of vocabulary or a reading sub-skill
• model the materials on successful activities and exercises that you have used before
• use a clear, simple layout for your print materials with plenty of white space
• don’t waste time on elaborate production techniques
• check your materials carefully, preferably with a colleague, before using them in the classroom
• be prepared to revise, completely rewrite or even ditch your materials
Summary for ELT material writers

• It is useful for teachers to be involved in supplementary materials writing
• Shared materials need quality control
• Institutions need to weigh carefully the benefits and costs of producing in-house materials
References

• Harrison, R *Materials Writing* in English Teaching Professional, 53 Nov 2003

• Hutchinson, T and Waters, A *English for Specific Purposes* CUP 1987


Thank you

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