Principles for the Use, Adaptation, and Development of Didactic Material

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Abstract

This paper offers guidelines for the use, adaptation and development of didactic material for the language classroom. It is based upon documentary research and the authors' past experiences as EFL teachers for adults in the Language Center of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Mexico. The purpose of didactic material is to facilitate language learning; thus, its creation should follow certain criteria. Ogalde and Bardavid's (2003) classification of didactic material, and Tomlinson's (1998) list of principles are discussed in this article as a basis. Furthermore, the authors have added one principle of their own, and included suggestions for working with didactic materials. This paper considers that if teachers base their daily teaching on learning principles and take into account students' learning styles, they will be able to incorporate appropriate materials into their lessons, enable the achievement of objectives, support their teaching strategies, and enhance students' attitudes and values.

Resumen

El presente artículo ofrece lineamientos para el uso, la adaptación, y el desarrollo de materiales didácticos para la enseñanza de idiomas. Está basado en investigación documental, así como en las experiencias docentes de los autores como maestros de inglés como lengua extranjera en la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California en México. El fin de los materiales didácticos es facilitar el aprendizaje de un idioma, por lo que su creación debe sujetarse a ciertos criterios. En este artículo, se presenta la clasificación de materiales didácticos de Ogalde y Bardavid (2003), así como la lista de los principios de Tomlinson (1998) como fundamentos. Se ha añadido un principio propio y se han incluido sugerencias para trabajar con los materiales didácticos. Se considera que, si los profesores basamos nuestra práctica diaria en los principios de aprendizaje, y tomamos en cuenta los estilos de aprendizaje de nuestros alumnos, incorporaremos a nuestras lecciones los materiales apropiados. Esto contribuirá a alcanzar los objetivos, a apoyar las estrategias didácticas, y a mejorar las actitudes y los valores de nuestros aprendices.

Introduction

When planning a language class, the teacher often incorporates didactic material as a complement. Morales (2012) defines didactic material as "a set of material means which intervene in and facilitate the process of teaching and learning" (p.10). Didactic material helps to facilitate language teaching and learning, whether a teacher has access to technological resources, such as a computer, an overhead projector, a CD player, video equipment, or others. In this article we will explore a number of principles when using didactic material.

Teachers should select, adapt, or create materials taking into consideration the program objectives as well as teaching strategies and students' learning styles. The use of proper materials can motivate students in their learning process. Keeping in mind that the purpose of didactic materials is to facilitate language learning, their adaptation and development should be based on a set of principles that ensure they are successful. These principles involve the impact that didactic materials will have on

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students. Didactic material should help students feel at ease and develop confidence. It should also give them the perception that what has been taught is relevant.

The authors hope this article will provide information for language teachers as to how they can meet their professional needs by facilitating their teaching practice through the use, adaptation, or development of didactic materials with or without a computer in the classroom setting.

Didactic Material

When one mentions the words didactic material, teachers may come up with a number of examples based on their perspectives, expectations, and experiences. Ogalde and Bardavid (2003) offer a list of didactic materials as the following: teaching materials, aids, auxiliaries, audiovisual resources, teaching resources, perceptual learning resources, educational materials, multisensory materials, and supplementary materials.

The definition of didactic material also varies depending on the authors. For instance, Tomlinson (1998) identifies didactic material as "anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language" (p. 2). Harmer (2005) refers to didactic material as "a variety of teaching aids to explain language meaning and construction, engage students in a topic, or as the basis of a whole activity" (p. 134). Ogalde and Bardavid (2003) define didactic material as "all those means and resources to facilitate the teaching-learning process within a global and systematic educational context, and stimulate the senses to facilitate the acquisition of concepts, abilities and skills, as well as the formation of attitudes and values" (p. 20). In the first two definitions, the authors make it clear that the purpose of didactic materials is to facilitate, construct, and give meaning to explanations in order to lead students to language learning. However, the definition provided by Ogalde and Bardavid includes the development of students' skills, and the formation of attitudes and values. This definition reflects the global purpose of education, which is the transformation of society through education.

Classification of Didactic Material

Didactic material can come from a variety of places such as textbooks, educationally produced teaching material, online sites and even from the teachers themselves— their own created material. Textbooks often provide the teachers and institutions with didactic material designed specifically for textbook lessons. These materials include flashcards, posters, games, worksheets, etc.

Teachers *adapt* didactic material when the existing ones need to be used for a different purpose. Accordingly, teachers present the didactic material changing what it initially intended to promote, and modifying the purpose of the activity to support the teaching strategies applied in a new activity. An example of didactic material adaptation could be a worksheet with different drawings to create a chain story. The story could be created by all members of the team to promote oral production. However, a teacher may ask students to work individually and use those drawings to write a story that reflects their use of the past tense, adequate punctuation, and spelling. Therefore, the use of such material is adapted according to the objectives.

On the other hand, teachers *develop* didactic materials when they create them to give meaning to their explanations or have their students create them as part of the activity. By being aware of the variety of didactic material and equipment, teachers

are able to decide which didactic material to use, adapt, and/or develop according to the context, and more importantly, the topic to teach.

Learning Styles

A class is made up of individuals with diverse learning styles. The classroom is a meeting point where students' learning styles come together. Kinsella (1995) mentions "A learning style refers to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods or content area" (p. 171). Thus, we can understand them as a way a student internalizes reality or the way he or she understands that which is taught in any given class.

Since students' learning styles involve perceptions, cognition, and socio-affective aspects which help guide students to learn in different ways, teachers are expected to be creative and innovative to meet these styles as much as possible (Dreyer & van der Walt, 1996). Some students learn better by performing, listening, reading, acting, or working individually or in teams, and so on.

Tomlinson (1998) considers that didactic material developers should cater to all learning styles and provides them as follows:

- Visual (e.g. the learner prefers to see the language written down);
- Auditory (e.g. the learner prefers to hear the language);
- Kinesthetic (e.g. the learner prefers to do something physical, such as following instructions);
- Studial (e.g. the learner likes to pay conscious attention to the linguistic features of the language and wants to be correct);
- Experimental (e.g. the learner likes to use the language and is more concerned with communication than with correctness);
- Analytic (e.g. the learner prefers to focus on discrete bits of the language and to learn them one by one);
- Global (e.g. the learner is happy to respond to whole chunks of language at a time and to pick up from them whatever languages she [sic] can);
- Dependent (e.g. the learner prefers to learn from a teacher and from a book);
- Independent (e.g. the learner is happy to learn from their [sic] own experience of the language and to use autonomous learning strategies). (p.17)

Besides taking into consideration the different learning styles, teachers need to reflect on other aspects which are present in learning situations and have an influence upon students' learning styles. Some of these aspects are: class atmosphere, motivational level, students' attitudes towards the teacher and vice versa, the physical environment (adequate/inadequate illumination and ventilation, large/small spaces, comfortable/uncomfortable seats, use of decoration, etc.), the class hour, to name a few.

Principles to Consider When Using, Adapting, or Developing Didactic Material

As a basis for the development and adaptation of didactic material, Tomlinson (1998) provides a "compilation of learning principles and procedures which most teachers agree contribute to successful learning" (p. 6). These can be seen as recommendations:

a) *Materials should achieve impact.*
b) *Materials should help learners to feel at ease.*
c) *Materials should help learners to develop confidence.*
d) *What is being taught should be perceived by learners as relevant and useful.*
e) *Materials should require and facilitate learner self-investment.*
f) *Learners must be ready to acquire the points being taught.*
g) *Materials should expose the learners to language in authentic use.*
h) *The learners' attention should be drawn to linguistic features of the input.*
i) *Materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes.*
j) *Materials should take into account that the positive effects of instruction are usually delayed.*
k) *Materials should take into account that learners differ in learning styles.*
l) *Materials should take into account that learners differ in affective attitudes.*
m) *Materials should permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction.*
n) *Materials should maximize learning potential by encouraging intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement, which stimulates both right and left-brain activities.*
o) *Materials should not rely too much on controlled practice.*
p) *Materials should provide opportunities for outcome feedback.*

(Tomlinson, 1998, pp. 7-22)

Even though Tomlinson's list of principles has a well-defined purpose, this article will focus on the first principle. Tomlinson (1998) mentions that materials achieve impact through:

· Novelty: That is the topics, illustrations, and activities are unusual.

· Variety: This refers not only to activities, but also to types of readings, different voices and accents on the listening program, etc.

· Attractive presentation: This is usually achieved through the use of color and illustrations or pictures.

· Appealing content: Topics should not be limited to those of interest to the learners; they should also offer students the opportunity to learn something new.

In addition to Tomlinson's characteristics, didactic material should contribute to the formation of attitudes and values in students. It is our belief that didactic material should not be limited to only facilitating the achievement of educational goals, but should also promote attitudes and values. For instance, when students work with didactic material individually, in pairs, or in teams they also:

· Cooperate by doing their part to help the team achieve a goal.

· Respect due dates.

· Collaborate in the completion of the procedures and activities.

· Negotiate among themselves in aspects such as naming a project, a story, an activity, and so forth.

· Solve any problems which might arise in a learning situation related to the task itself, or conflicts due to team members' personalities.

· Carry out research to contribute to the task completion or to contribute with their part to the completion of the team's general task.

· Learn to make decisions individually or within a team.

· Be aware of the other team members' thoughts and feelings.

· Share experiences and emotions through socialization processes.

Suggestions When Working with Didactic Material

Based on our experiences as EFL teachers in Mexico, we will now present suggestions when working with didactic material. Teachers should consider what level the material was created for, and what level the students are at. Materials created for advanced students may create confusion if used with students of lower levels. Didactic material should support meaningful learning. A topic out of context can diminish students' interest. Auditory materials must be clear and spoken at an appropriate speed; background noise should be minimal. Likewise, visual materials which include PowerPoint presentations should be clear, easy to read and understand, attractive, and well designed.

Didactic material should promote cooperation and collaboration among students, as well as higher thinking skills, such as problem-solving, decision-making and negotiation. Instructions should be precise and easy to understand. The role of the students should be defined in order to avoid confusion. Didactic material should satisfy the different learning styles of the students. Care should be taken when organizing collaborative teams. Teaming up a dependent-visual learner with a kinesthetic-independent one could cause tension among the team members, for example. Finally, didactic material should develop the formation of attitudes and values. Personal conflicts not overcome could end up dividing the team members.

Ur (2002) gives advice to teachers when working with didactic material: "when planning…always have a 'back up' alternative lesson ready!" (p.191). She points out that overhead projectors, computers, video and audio equipment are excellent to work with because they are more vivid and attention-catching materials. However, they may also have technical problems: electricity failure, bulbs burning out, and lack of mobility. On the other hand, Ur (2002) mentions that "Good teacher-made materials are arguably the best there are: relevant and personalized, answering the needs of the learners in a way no other materials can" (p.192).Without diminishing the capacity electronic equipment has to facilitate language learning, we agree with Ur's suggestion of having a 'back up' plan for those moments when the use of electronics is not possible. At the end of this article, we have included some examples of didactic material teachers can use, adapt, or develop (see Appendix).

Conclusion

Teachers should visualize themselves as didactic material developers for several reasons. Didactic material facilitates students' language learning by tapping into the learning styles of the students and by motivating them. Materials facilitate the instruction of almost any class topic and opens up the outside word within the classroom.

This article included a classification of didactic materials that teachers can use, adapt, and develop in their classes. Subsequently, it presented a list of learning principles that teachers should take into account when working with didactic materials (Tomlinson, 1998). We also mentioned that didactic materials should contribute to the formation of attitudes and values in students, and they should not only be limited to facilitating the achievement of educational goals. Finally, our article offered practical suggestions for working with didactic material. By considering the points

mentioned above, teachers will provide their students with effective learning materials which can enrich the classroom experience.

References

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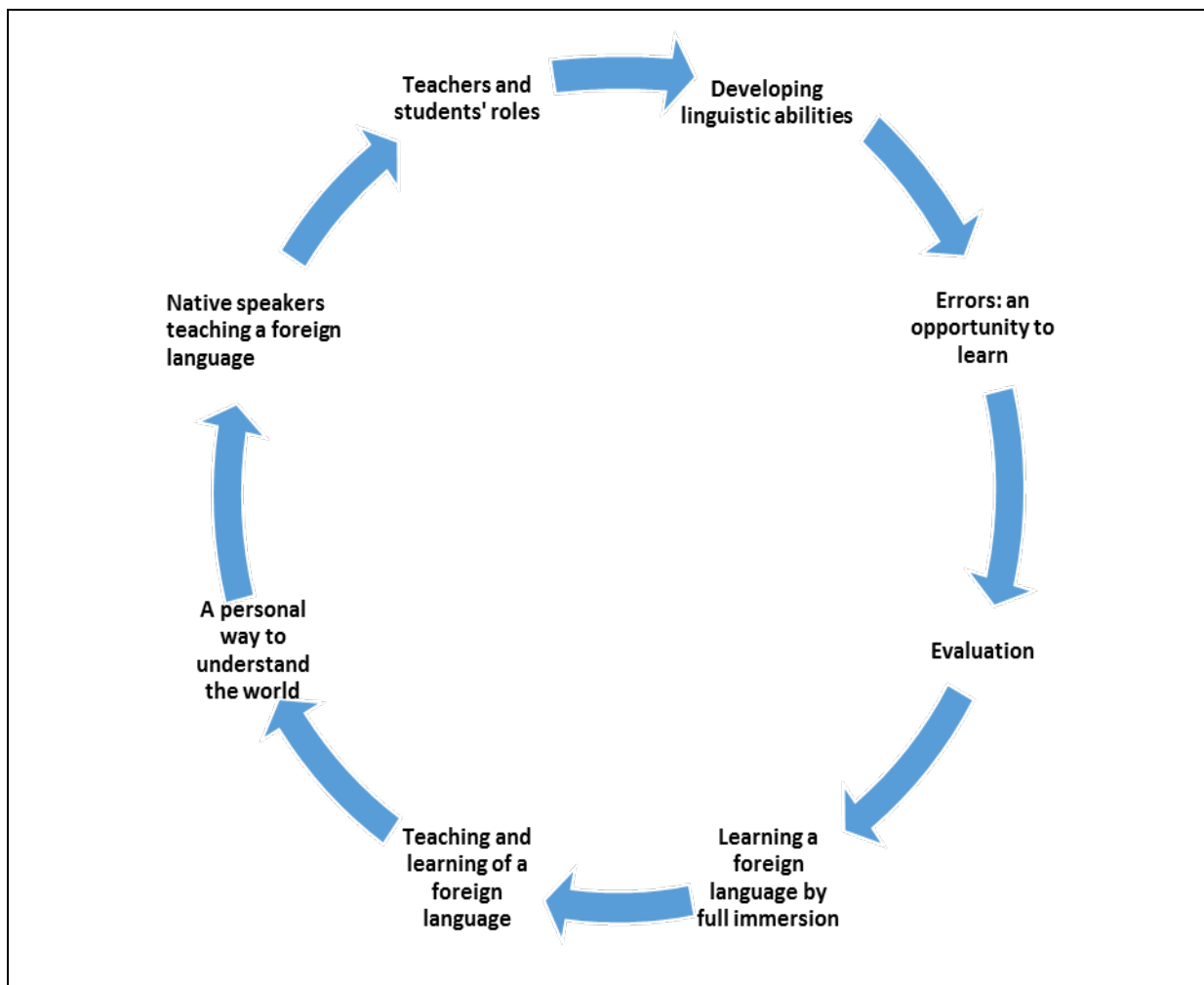Ur, P. (2002). *A course in language teaching. Practice and theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix Examples of Didactic Material

Posters

Google images: https://translate.google.com/#es/en/assure%0Aprincipios%20que%20ase
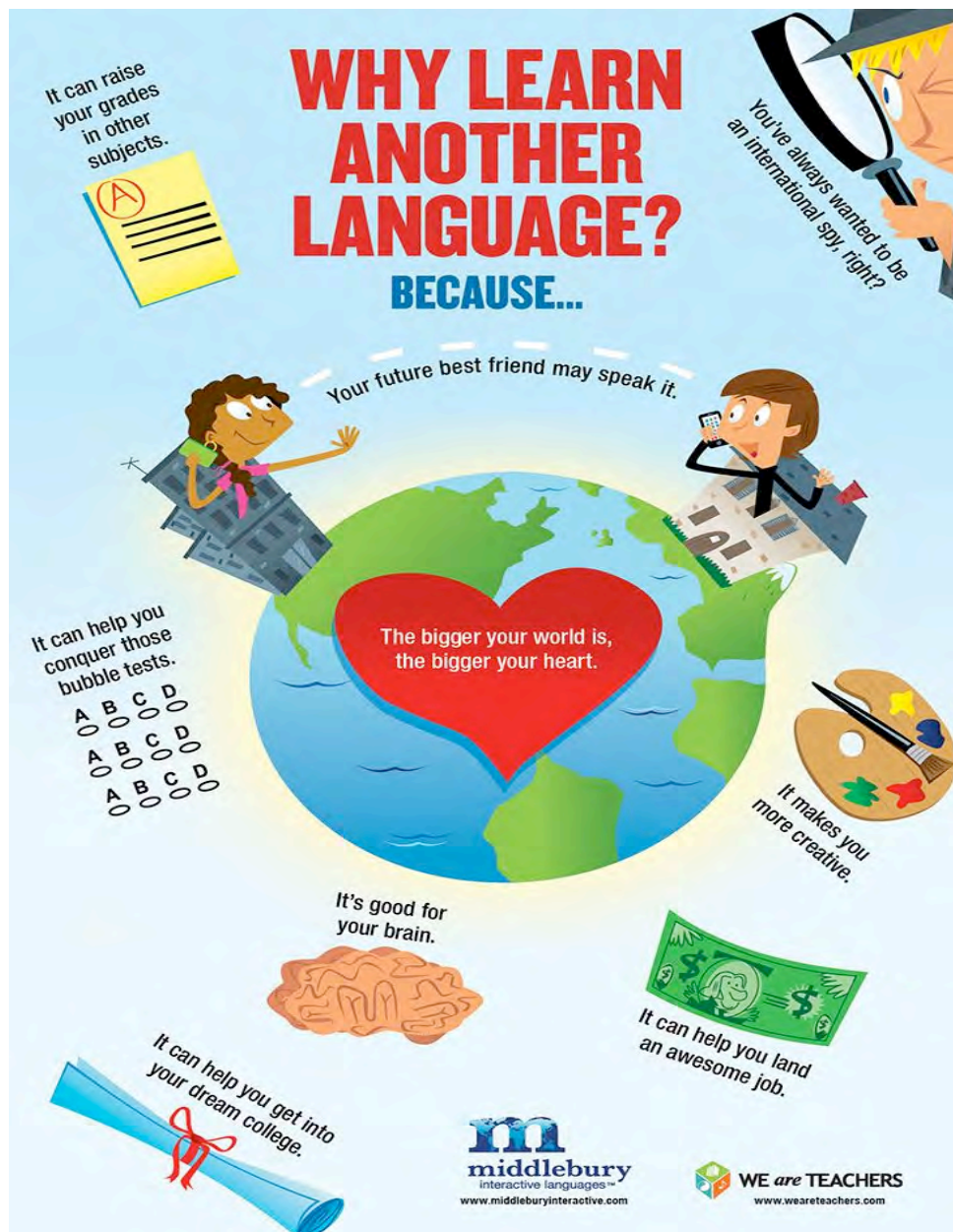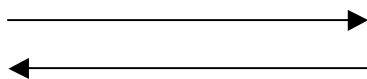
Concept maps

Mental maps

Understanding the world through languages …

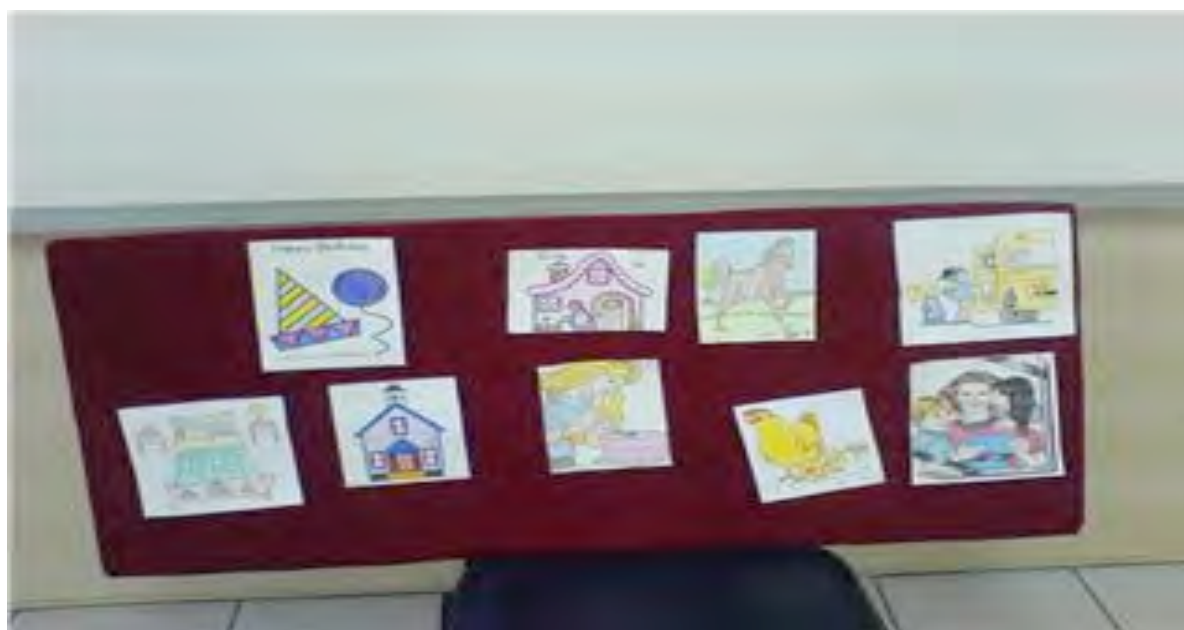makes it possible understand each other.

Source: Google images

Comics

Source: Students of the BA in English Language Teaching (3rd semester from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California)

Flannel boards

Flash Cards