Making the materials writing leap: scaffolding the journey from teacher to teacher-writer

Jane Spiro

Abstract

This chapter tracks the journey from teacher to materials writer, exploring the challenges, compromises and co-creation in making the leap from one to the other. The chapter explores some of the issues that confront the materials writer in a changing world, including the role of printed materials, the impact of digital media, and potential conflicts between teaching and publication. Multiple 'real-world' materials writing scenarios are shared to illustrate the challenges and compromises of developing professionalism in this shifting landscape. A notion of 'informed preparedness' is suggested as a way of navigating these challenges to arrive at principled and worthwhile materials.

Introduction

My first home-made material was a page laid out with blank squares for learners to create ideas for newspaper content. It was a rebellion against the fictional characters in the coursebook, whose grey suburban routines failed spectacularly to engage my large

class of Spanish teenagers. I decided to transform the class into an editorial team to create an English language newspaper they could produce and sell to the rest of the school. It was a risky leap, when my supervisors expected grammar-focused lessons; but for this class, it made the English language spring into life. They were surprised and delighted to find that language learning was not about odd responses to even odder fictional situations, but about lived and living experiences.

This first home-made resource was a response to published materials that could not meet the precise needs of my learners, nor match my own belief in creative learning. Many teachers may remember a similar moment when, driven by sensitivity to their specific learners and by personal values about teaching, they became materials writers of their own classes for the first time,.

But this is just the first step in a torturous route towards professionalization as a materials writer. The published materials writer is required to 'graduate' from her own classroom and write for an audience less known, more generic, and defined as much by the marketing team as by the language teaching team. Whilst something is gained, in terms of impact on a wider range of learners and teachers, much too might be compromised. Bell and Gower (2011), Hadfield (2014) and Timmis (2014) are materials writers who describe this compromise, navigating between the values of the principled teacher-turned-writer, and those of the publishing industry. The leap from effective classroom lesson to the published resource entails compromise for everyone: the publisher who needs to balance 'innovation and conservatism' (Bell and Gower 2011:

140); the author who will 'find themselves compromising and having compromise forced upon them' (ibid 141) and the teacher who know their needs 'can never be fully met' by a published resource. Given all these compromises, how can the materials writer retain that inspiration the teacher had, when developing lesson resources for a group of known learners? For those first teaching-inspired materials to be useable by others; their purpose must be clear, methods and instructions transparent, self-contained and not reliant on anything else assumed to exist in the classroom. That might mean stripping out much that is unique to a specific setting, and making clear much which was obvious when it sprang out of the last lesson.

This chapter attempts to explore what it is to make this journey from teacher to materials writer, by developing an informed preparedness for its many challenges. The chapter tracks the route from teacher to professional writer through real world case studies, exploring the challenges and compromises made by materials writers as they navigate different roles and values as teacher, writer, and team player.

We start, in the section below, with a journey through decades of change in approach to materials and materials writers.

Critical issues and topics

Dependency on coursebooks

In the 1980's, for many teachers the life of the classroom and the textbook were one and the same. In 1989 Tyson and Woodward estimated that 'textbooks structure up to 90% of what teachers do in the classroom' (Harwood 2014: 1). Schools committed to a

coursebook for five or more years, and in many cases were bound to it for years after it continued to suit their needs. Not only was the syllabus taught and made visible through the coursebook; in addition so was pedagogy and methodology. The teacher's development was critically shaped by what happened in the coursebook. Through it, the teacher met new pedagogic fashions: communicative teaching, task-based learning, the lexical syllabus, text-driven teaching. Materials writers were the unchallenged gods of the classroom, the ELT 'rock stars' and individual teachers had them to thank or bemoan for the life and success of their language classes.

This made for a troubled relationship between teachers and their materials.Sheldon, in 1988, describes published materials like a bad marriage, as something teachers 'both hate to love and love to hate' (Sheldon 1988: 237). Tomlinson goes so far as to say 'ELT materials currently make a significant contribution to the failure of many learners of English' (Tomlinson 2008: 3). However, whilst teachers were often not able to change their coursebook, at least resources such as Cunningsworth (1995) were emerging, which gave teachers opportunities to choose and evaluate them. Cunningsworth (1995) introduced frameworks for evaluation which were meaningful and practical for the teacher, and gave them at least some measure of choice. Mukundan and Ahour's retrospective of textbook evaluation (2010) shows that, between 1970–2007, teachers were given increasingly sophisticated strategies for critiquing their coursebooks and identifying matches and mismatches with the needs of their learners.

Social and political critiquing of materials

Not only teachers were critiquing the role of coursebooks in the real life of the

classroom. Unsettling questions began to be asked by sociologists of language and critical discourse analysts such as Alptekin (2002) and Pennycook (2006) . They raised now questions such as: isn't it unrealistic to expect learners all over the world to use the same materials and respond to them in the same way? What assumptions are global publishers making about which language and culture is to be taught? Pennycook (2006) suggested western-based publishers were imposing their views of language learning on cultures with entirely different views about learning, power, gender relationships and education. Holliday (2005) identified the very different ELT worlds, not only internationally, but intra-nationally within state and private sectors, and asked challenging new questions such as: how can the teacher with fifty children in a state school preparing for a grammar-translation school leaving exam, be expected to use the same materials with the same results as a teacher of 12 adults learning general English at a British Council evening school in Madrid? The supremacy of the global textbook, published in the western world for the rest of the world, was compared by Hadley (2014) to mass production, and the rule of global 'brands' over the local and home-grown. It was clear teachers were not content any longer with their classroom lives being shaped by a materials writer in another continent. Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggested teachers were in a 'post-methods' world, becoming more conscious of and critical of orthodoxies handed down by others, choosing, selecting and adapting to suit their own unique setting and learners. It was for both publishers and materials writers to respond to this challenge, to see how they might ethically fit in and continue to make a contribution.

One practical response to this dilemma emerged in the 1990s, with an era of funded

professional development. Organisations such as the British Council, ODA (Overseas Development in the UK), funding bodies such as Soros and local ministries of education sponsored projects in which materials were jointly written by publishing teams alongside local teachers. The process was developmental for all: teachers developed expertise alongside experienced materials writers who in turn were learning about local learning needsExamples of in-house materials written jointly in this way include: the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman (Al-Busaidi and Tindle 2010), the Romanian textbook project (Popovici and Bolitho 2003); the Namibian textbook project (Tomlinson 1995). These coursebooks included the home language of the learner judiciously blended with the target language; material that was culturally sensitive, abiding by religious taboos and values, and including settings which were familiar. Where there were characters in texts, their names were culturally familiar to the learners and looked like them. The pedagogy was adapted to work in the target classrooms – such as large classes, fixed furniture, girls taught separately from boys, and other potential factors in planning classroom activities. Whether learners really preferred this mirror of themselves, or in fact saw language learning as an opportunity to join a larger world and enter other shoes, remains a question to ask of each learning context.

The materials writer as co-creator

The projects described above were innovative, but they could still be critiqued on the same grounds; that the global publisher, and the experienced materials writer dominated decisions and outcomes. A new movement suggested something more radical. Thornbury and his colleagues (2009) trialled an approach in which published

materials were replaced by materials brought or made by the students and teacher, or found in the classroom. In observing the teachers, Thornbury noticed they were more motivated, creative and engaged using their own materials (Thornbury 2009: 3). This led to an approach he called *dogme*, of which the first commandment was the following:

> Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom – i.e. themselves – and whatever happens to be in the classroom.   (Thornbury 2009: 3)

This was a call inviting teachers to take their place alongside materials writers as co-creators. The dogme call to teacher creativity generated a culture of sharing resources emerging authentically from the classroom. Here teachers could take ownership of their materials, and where these materials fell short of their needs, become writers themselves, with many platforms where they might contribute. (See, for example, the Teach Hub http://www.teachhub.com/learning-their-way-dogme-elt-one-teachers-viewpoint).

The digital revolution makes such sharing all the more available. It also, potentially, makes the materials writer role more precarious or even 'endangered' (Masuhara 2011). A 21st century generation of learners are often skilled 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001) familiar with accessing information instantly through online search engines, translation and dictionary apps, digital translations, voice recognition tools, downloadable English song lyrics or lesson plans with answer keys. What can the materials writer contribute,

which the learner cannot find for themselves, or the teacher create for themselves?

There is a clear answer to this question for the 21st century digitally-aware materials writer. Abundance of learning opportunity does not necessarily lead to effective learning, and can even result in overload and passivity. The opportunities of the online world still needs to be paced, managed and harnessed for learning (Salmon 2002). Day and Sharma (2014) point out that printed materials are linear and offer clear directions to learners, whilst digital learning is non-linear and the learner can wander in many directions. An experienced materials writer might turn this freedom into a meaningful and structured resource for learning. Here, then, is another co-creation, between the teacher maximising learning opportunities (as suggested by Allen 2105), the learner freely wandering in a cyberworld, and the materials writer turning these opportunities into effective learning.

These historical landmarks suggest that materials writers need to be in a close relationship with teachers, their 'users', and make bridges between classrooms, publishers and the world of readily available information.

Implications and challenges for materials development

Materials through many lenses

Mukundan and Ahour's study of textbook evaluation (2010) shows that teachers have asked similar questions about materials for four decades (1970 – 2007): do they meet the needs of learners, are they engaging, are they relevant in terms of content,

language and skills development, do they meet meaningful and appropriate learning goals, are they 'teachable'? If the teacher answers in the negative to any of these questions, she can make adaptations in the privacy of her own classroom.

However, for the publisher, shortcomings are far less easily resolved. 'If any shortcomings are apparent, the materials are in circulation to an audience of literally hundreds of thousands of students and teachers' (Amrani 2011; 271). If something goes wrong, there might be 'significant loss of revenue and potentially, jobs' (ibid). Whilst the teacher is alone in her classroom making changes and decisions, the publisher needs to gather a wide range of opinions from multiple stakeholders including, potentially, the marketing team, ministry of education, funding bodies, teachers and parents, series advisers, design and production teams (See Timmis's list in 2014: 242). So in evaluating materials, the publisher's questions are likely to be very different to the ones asked above by the teacher. How innovative can the materials dare to be? Where is the balance between what teachers – or 'users' of materials – already know and like, and what will be exciting and new? Where is that perfect 'biting point' between the two which will entice teachers to buy the new resources?

Clandfield (2013) describes the three kinds of editor a materials writer is likely to encounter once the materials are in progress. The first is the commissioning editor who communicates the 'big vision' of the book, selecting the authors most likely to internalise, represent and deliver this. The 'content editor' scrutinises the material once it is commissioned, for match with this vision. The 'copy editor' helps with all the multiple

adjustments to make this vision accurate, presentable, consistent and polished.

Unlike the teacher making decisions in the privacy of a classroom, the materials writer is part of a team, and there are other leaders and decision-makers in this team who all need to work together. The questions may work at the most detailed level. Are instruction verbs used consistently so readers/users are not distracted by rubric? Is all the material for each unit complete and self-contained- such as easy access to audio-tapes and answer keys. Is it clear which activity is designed for class interaction and which for individual study? Do your activities match the big vision or are they too ambitious? Too wide-ranging? Not really targeting the level or age group of the audience? Not culturally appropriate? These questions entail constant negotiation and self-reflection on the part of the materials writer. The materials writer may well feel their creativity to be 'diminished' and 'attenuated' by decisions which are not their own (Timmis 2014). It is a skilled juggling act, remembering what it is to be a teacher, being compliant with the publisher's concept, and creating new material, all at the same time. . Given these many challenges, how can the materials writer prepare for these and what are the stepping stones on the materials writer's journey?

The spark of an idea

We mentioned in the opening section, that for the teacher the starting point is often a perceived need, and a gap in resources that meet this need. For the publisher, however, Amrani (2014) reminded us that the stakes are very much higher. To commit to an innovation is to involve potentially thousands, (even millions) of teachers in accepting something new. Materials are powerful agents of change. Swales and Feak

(2012) introduced to university students a genre-based approach to teaching academic skills in *Academic Writing for Graduate Students,* (Swales and Feak 2012). Thornbury introduced an approach to teaching language based on the word as the organising unit, rather than grammar in *Natural English* (2004). Clandfield and Benne (2015) pioneered a coursebook in which language is taught through content *about* language in *Global English,* (Clandfield and Benne 2015).

Where do the incentives for these changes come from? The teacher is an important starting point: making discoveries in their classroom or telling publishers what they need. For example, *Global English* (Clandfield and Benne 2015) responded to teachers telling them 'if you are going to write another English coursebook for the English language, please try to do something a bit different' (2015: ii). Their 'unique selling point' is language taught through content about language, with short articles in each unit by David Crystal about the history, etymology, and story of language. New data from the linguist/researcher is another starting point. *Collins Cobuild English Course* (Willis and Willis 1988) came from the huge corpus of everyday spoken English developed by the publisher Collins, and the question: how can we use this corpus to teach language? The big idea must do many things: it must work well beyond your own classroom, it must be supported by research, it must fill a perceived gap in the market, it must have the capacity to be generative – in other words, to produce not just one lesson plan or resource book, but many and over many years (as has been the case with the corpus, and with genre approaches). For it to go further than the classroom, most of all a commissioning publisher must be convinced and take ownership of the big idea: and it

could be at this point it will start to be pulled back and forwards by the publisher's search for the 'biting point' between innovation and conservatism suggested above.

So can the individual make a difference? Teacher insights into what is needed may trigger the next innovation; but it cannot do so alone. To make the leap from teacher to materials writer involves, not only the honing of skills in many of the ways suggested above (and to be developed in the next sections), but also knowing what is cutting edge in research, understanding what teachers and learners really need and spotting a gap in what is already available. All these take the teacher outside their own classroom so they can become a drop in the ocean that joins with many others to direct the flow.

Inner and outer editors: owning materials
Wherever the initial spark of an idea comes from, the materials writer needs to internalise its values and concepts and translate it into a reality that will work for teachers well beyond their own specific context.

For the teacher, the testing of materials comes from the classroom. he reflective teacher asks 'how effective was my lesson? How did my learners respond?' Most teachers will be familiar with asking themselves these questions, and evaluating themselves on a daily basis according to their own values and criteria. In contrast, the materials writer within a team may receive feedback from multiple sources that do not have quite the same values. The publisher may be thinking of impact and mass sales; the editor of maximum usability by the 'users' of the materials. There may also be feedback from

school leaders who wish to sell their courses, parents who want their children to fit in rather than stand out, Ministry representatives who want the book to reflect national principles and values. What if all these different 'editors' have principles in conflict with one another and with the materials writer? How does the materials writer negotiate them all?

Tomlinson makes an interesting distinction between principles and procedures. He warns that 'closed principles can lead to inflexible procedures which cater for a minority of learners only' (2011: 148). For example, if you believe that listening is the first learnt skill, does that mean beginners should not have sight at all of written texts? If a reviewer critiques materials written on this basis, could it be that they are uncovering a certain inflexibility which indeed needs to be addressed? Here is Tomlinson's answer, with my own highlighted phrases:

> I think it lies in the overt establishment of **agreed and justifiable principles** followed by **procedural compromises** which cater for differing preferences.

(Tomlinson 2011: 148)

What this means in practice, is that it is possible for the materials writer to adapt activities and tasks so they work for audience and publisher, without compromising their core underlying beliefs. Yet this may not always be quite so easy. Timmis (2014) offers the example of a text-driven project for Asia. On several occasions, the texts he chose were challenged by the publisher: they were not sufficiently Asian, or they touched on

topics culturally inappropriate for Asian learners. Publisher and materials writer were in agreement that the coursebook should be text-driven: but what texts would be acceptable? Timmis navigated his way through these differences to arrive at texts acceptable both to himself and to the publisher.

These outer editors check for a match between publisher specifications and the materials themselves; but it is only the inner editor that can determine whether the compromises feel worthwhile, or if they are a step too far. Four successful coursebook authors were asked by Prowse (2011) about the factors which made a writing project worthwhile. They mentioned feeling a project was 'fun', allowed them to be creative, to follow their inspiration, and to be absorbed (Prowse 2011: 136). When these ingredients were in place, they felt the compromises to be worthwhile; and conversely, abandoned projects which lacked these ingredients. Mares (2002) describes his reasons for writing a coursebook as 'the desire to produce more effective materials that truly engage learners, are pedagogically sound and have a general appeal beyond the tastes of one individual in his/her own teaching environment.' (Mares 2002: 131). This perfectly illustrates the imperative for the materials writer to write in a way that is congruent with beliefs about teaching, and core values which make a task worthwhile. Only the inner editor can determine if this is so.

Recommendations for practice

It is timely to return to our starting point: that materials writing begins in the classroom, to meet the needs of learners. This section recommends a sequence of thinking points

for the materials writer: from first response to learner needs through to gathering feedback on finished resources. The recommendations are applied to real-world stories of situations encounteredby the author this chapter while running workshops for novice and developing materials writers, in Romania, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Mexico, Poland, Hungary, and Oxford (1993 – 2020), and also while working as a materials writer myself between 2001- 2020 with publishers in Germany, Italy, Scotland and England.

Recommendation 1: Define your audience

A first recommendation is to identify as precisely as possible the potential gap you might wish to fill as a materials writer. This will entail a leap from 'my classroom' to the generic characteristics of the learners in that classroom: their age, level, context, learning needs. It will entail the key question: How far are these specific needs likely to be replicated in other classrooms and contexts too? For example, Damion, working in an international school, noticed there were insufficient materials to help teachers plan their induction week, and the activities set up did not specifically help the children who had a second language or second culture. However, as he began to develop his materials to meet this gap he realised that:

- many schools did not have a dedicated induction week, so materials exclusively designed for such a week would have limited value
- teachers were more concerned when a child arrived after the start of term, missing the usual acclimatising stages.

This meant the resources would have much wider value if they were designed for use throughout the school year. It also meant the materials were unlikely to be for class use,

mediated by a teacher, but rather for one-to-one use between learner and teaching assistant, and perhaps also parents and peers.

This example demonstrates the caution not to generalise too easily from your own classroom to others; but to research the idea, the audience and the market before making the materials writing leap.

Recommendation 2: Understand the distinctiveness of your materials

A next step is for the future materials writer to be fully appraised of what materials are already available that claim to fill, or come near to, the identified gap. A 'market research' trawl of current publications is a critical part of the journey towards materials writing mastery; and having found these potential rivals or companions, to analyse them for insights into their success or otherwise. The potential author aiming for a principled understanding of how his/her materials are to be unique might review publisher and materials websites, publisher catalogues, bookshop and library resources, collections and resources in their own school, to be sure they are not reinventing a wheel successfully invented already.

Annette's scenario is an example of an idea which needed to change radically as an example of publisher caution and duplication of her idea elsewhere.

> Annette used TED talks freely available online as a starting point for learners to debate real world issues. She wanted to develop her lesson notes to scaffold discussion of issues such as climate change, colonisation, drought; refugee crises; unemployment and casualised labour.

The editor, however, required the teacher to 'tone down' the focus on issues in dealing with the talks, and instead use them in a conventional way to practice features of spoken language. In addition, the publisher pointed out that the TED talks, were already available online, with transcripts and teaching materials: and that Annette's materials needed to do something new. Annette changed her concept instead to structure the way a learner might develop the TED topic by using and navigating search engines in a principled way. The focus shifted from the topics themselves, to search skills for researching a topic, and in so doing became 'something new'.

Recommendation 3: Research the terrain

To make an original contribution, materials writers need to know where their ideas sit amongst current and cutting edge debates. For example, if you are using natural everyday language for listening practice, it is helpful to be aware of the spoken corpus as a teaching resource, or the analysis of spoken grammar as a distinctive form of the language (for example, Cullen and Kuo 2007). If you are writing materials for the induction of international students, it is helpful to consider links between language, identity and wellbeing (for example, Lantolf 2011). A popular myth is that the materials writer is a-theoretical (Samuda 2005); yet every decision about materials can be explained, supported, or contribute to, questions and theories about learning and teaching.

Flora's scenario below is an example of a teacher who had a good idea that was radically changed as a result of research.

Flora noticed that all the spoken language examples in her coursebook were artificial. She decided to create her own listening materials by recording fluent English speakers (not necessarily native speakers) freely discussing topics allocated by her. She wanted to develop this idea into a 'bank' of authentic listening material to be published with supporting guidelines for teachers.

Flora's 'big idea' was to use these recordings in order to highlight multiple aspects of natural spoken language. She also felt that fluent, natural language input is more engaging than language controlled for level and learning goals.

- Through the lens of the teacher, this listening material was not sufficiently fine-tuned to the level of their learners, making the material unteachable.
- Through the lens of the publisher, the dialogues would not work on their own without full support for the teacher as to how they might be used. As free-standing materials for learners, 'distracting' elements such as 'fillers' and social language would need to be stripped out so listeners could concentrate on meaning.

This feedback told Flora that the notion of authenticity needed a great deal more work. The 'big idea' might be all very well, but if teachers were not able to work with it, or learners learn from it, it would need rethinking. She changed her activities to focus on the very features which the publishers thought would be distracting, such as fillers, phatic/social language and turn-taking, so that the difficulties of authentic language

were acknowledged and turned into teaching aims.

Recommendation 4: Learn from others

The materials writer needs, not only to work within a community, but actively to learn from it. There are several ways of gathering information which may help to refine and shape materials for their use in the real world.

- Piloting or talking through with an experienced materials writer.

- Piloting or talking through with peers

- Focus group talking to teachers *before* using your materials about their needs.

- Focus group talking to teachers *after* using your materials to share their responses.

- One-to-one, semi-structured interviews with teachers who used your materials.

- Observing your materials being used in class.

- Questionnaires to all the learners who used your materials in class.

Ranjit's situation, below, shows how materials changed radically as a result of communication with teachers and publishers.

Ranjit changed his coursebook materials so the fictional names of characters were replaced by names culturally familiar to the learners. The settings were changed from cities (like Washington DC) which were completely alien to the learners, to the rural area of Sri Lanka where the learners live. He wanted to

publish his materials so they could be used by other teachers like himself in rural Sri Lanka.

These changes reflected Ranjit's principles as a teacher: that learning should be personalised and meaningful, and that learning situations should reflect the learners themselves and their own lives. However, these changes meant something different through the eyes of the students and his potential publisher.

- Through the lens of the publisher, these local changes made it less publishable because the local references might alienate those *not* teaching in those regions.
- The learners were disappointed that the materials were not 'transporting' them to different places. They reported hat they liked 'meeting' characters from other parts of the world. Ranjit realised the language lesson for them was a place of imagined travel.

Ranjit's solution was to seek sponsorship for materials development training and to 'cascade' these skills among the rural communities so teachers could adapt materials for themselves, customising them for their own classrooms.

Writers may see themselves as individuals driven by inspiration, but professional materials writers need to remember they are always part of a community, and can only function successfully inside it. For example, they may need to write something that has been defined and specified by someone else, rather than being guided by their own ideas. They may be accustomed to responding to their own classes as a teacher, but as

a materials writer they must come to collective decisions and compromises.

Recommendation 5: Be prepared for revision and compromise

Most of all, developing as a materials writer is a continuing process; the trialling leads to reflection, and the reflection to revision. Entering the professional materials writing world will add many further layers. The compromises become greater, not less, as one moves from teacher to professional. The practical writing apprenticeship is only one part of a bigger process which involves coming to know which compromises are worth making and why, and with what costs and gains. Below are some examples of teacher-writers interacting with publishing advice.

Compromise 1) Task goals

The teacher had set up a diary 'free writing' activity in which learners can write freely about a dream or memory without worrying about language choice. Only once the free writing has been done, did the teacher then focus on verb choices to describe past and future activities, so learners can then edit and expand their diaries. The teacher submits this idea to an edited collection of lessons by a publishing company to reflect local teacher ideas.

The content editor, however, insists that the learning goals be made clear from the start, so learners are guided to write their memories using the simple past, 'I remember' or 'used to' sentence frames. She says the 'free writing' would be too difficult in the classrooms of many teachers who may be using this book.

Compromise 2) Language

The teacher has written a story in which she uses the metaphor; 'The rain sounded like horses galloping on the roof'.

The editor insists that figurative language is too advanced for this level of learner and changes it to: 'it was raining hard'. Every similar example of colourful or figurative language is changed in the same way.

Compromise 3) Culture

The teacher has prepared a short dialogue in which young people talk about their ambitions for the future. In one dialogue a young woman is talking about her wish to be a doctor.

The editor changes the dialogue so the young woman's goal is to be a nurse, rather than a doctor. She explains this role would be more culturally appropriate for girls amongst the coursebook users.

Compromise 4) Critical thinking

The materials writer has written a short story in which the main character thinks he can fly. The story ends with the reader not quite knowing if the character is dreaming, hallucinating or misremembering a childhood incident. The aim is to encourage discussion about the different options.

The editor says the ambiguity will be confusing for readers. They may think they have misunderstood the text, and will expect a clear ending. She insists the writer chooses one of the endings and make this absolutely clear.

These examples show how differently materials might be seen through the lens of the materials writer, and through the lens of the publisher. We see the juggling acts between the big idea and practice, and between practice and the wider picture. Teachers know what works well for their own learners, but publishers want something both new and exciting, and also widely useable by discerning teachers well beyond a specific place or time. This is the dynamic nature of materials writing, and why the task of the materials writer is a continuous balancing act.

Future directions

We opened this chapter by suggesting **that** achieving mastery as a materials writer entails developing an informed preparedness for its many challenges. What does this mean for the future?

It means that materials writers need to be clear about their distinctive contribution. They are practitioners interrogating research for practical relevance; and writers interrogating the classroom for relatability to a wider context. They are also learning technologists, critical of the difference between a genuine learning opportunity and simply access to information.

The best materials writer of the future may look very like the best materials writer of the past; informed, critical, bridging the classroom and the publishing industry; harnessing changes in the world of information to best purpose for learning, and open to feedback from all the different 'stakeholders' who publish, use, learn and teach from materials, holding values not as unexamined rituals, but as informed principles. In an ideal future, every training course for ELT teachers will give them an opportunity to develop this expertise, to take the leap from their own classrooms towards materials writing mastery.

Conclusions

Amongst the key overarching messages of this chapter, is that the materials writer needs to be up to date with developments around them: developments in research, learning, teaching, resources and technologies. The materials writer role is not a fixed one and entails constant sensitivity to this changing world. Yet amidst this constant change, there are indeed some fixed points. One of these is the importance of 'informed preparedness' as the best ally for the teacher making a journey towards materials writing. Another is the writer's sense of worth; the materials writer's belief that the compromises are worthwhile, and that something as a result has changed for the better.

Further Reading

Bell, J. and Gower, R. , 2011. Writing course materials for the world: a great compromise. In Tomlinson, B. (ed.) Materials Development in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 135 – 150.

Bell and Gower accept the position that materials writing is always a compromise and will never quite meet the needs of the target audience. They ask the question what can be done then by the materials writer, so at least they are meeting the needs of some of the learners some of the time.

Forman, S. (2004) Textbook Publishing: An Ecological View. In T*he Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Mar., 2005), pp. 1398-1404

https://academic-oup-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/jah/article-abstract/91/4/1398/710160/Textbook-Publishing-An-Ecological-View?redirectedFrom=fulltext

This article maps the large number of stakeholders involved in the writing of textbooks. It discusses not only the large number of people involved in the conceiving and writing of a coursebook, but the impact it then has widely both on what learners know and how they learn about it.

Hadfield. J., 2014. Chaosmos: Spontaneity and Order in Materials Design Process. In Harwood, N. pp. 320 – 359

Hadfield tracks her own process as she distils the findings of research into practical and publishable teacher development activities. Her starting point is to make research meaningful to teachers and demonstrate its impact on their practice. She illustrates the adaptations, compromises, revisions made en route towards a finished product. In so

doing, she compares her own experience with other materials writers, to find that what they have in common is an interweaving of spontaneous and disorderly thinking with planning and precision of purpose.

Jolly, D. and Bolitho, R., 2011. A framework for materials writing. In Tomlinson, B. (ed) *Materials Writing in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In contrast to Hadfield's article, Bolitho and Tomlinson describe materials writing as an aspect of preparing a lesson for a specific group of learners. In contrast to the articles above, it assumes the materials writing process is a direct relationship between teacher and learner, rather than between materials writer and notional audience/publisher. The article, therefore, puts the teacher back into the materials writing process and suggests a cycle which is akin to action research.

5. Related topics (related chapters in this volume)

    How do writers write: Materials as a tool for professional development

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