

Selecting Appropriate and Effective Materials for Adult ESOL Instruction

Published by the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL)

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With so many materials—and types of materials available—it can be a challenge for program administrators and teachers to choose the most appropriate and effective materials for the learners with whom they work. This issue can be especially difficult because publishers offer so much information about various products that it can be difficult to know what is actually best for learners in their specific programs. In addition, diverse opinions about what to look for in adult ESOL instructional materials and various rubrics and forms may confound even the most careful researcher (see bibliography, below).

Instructional materials can vary widely—from index cards, picture dictionaries, and newspaper articles to core text series, software programs and the Internet, and reading or grammar books. In all cases, however, programs should determine that the materials are appropriate to the specific adult English language learners with whom they work and that there is a strong likelihood that the materials will be effective in moving learners toward their English language learning and life goals.

Three general guidelines may help programs choose the most suitable textbooks and other materials:

- ❖ Understand that while a textbook core series (or software package) can potentially be a useful support to a program—especially one with novice adult ESOL teachers—a textbook series is neither an assessment package nor a curriculum. A curriculum is a flexible instructional framework that is based on the needs of the learners and other stakeholders, reflects a program’s mission and goals, includes outcomes, approaches, methods, resources, and measurable learning objectives, and is sensitive to the culture, language, and literacy needs of learners (TESOL, 2003). (See bibliography, below for examples of adult ESOL curricula).

Advice: Review the wealth of instructional materials and advice available from non-profit organizations and government-funded sources, including MCAEL.

- ❖ Be wary of publishers’ claims that their product/s can do everything.

Advice: Most publishers will provide free review copies, so review offerings from several publishers, especially in a committee that includes administrators and teachers.

- ❖ Consider developing a collection of instructional materials (such as class sets of picture dictionaries, learner’s dictionaries, readers, and teacher-made, topical, and real-life materials

to augment or replace class textbooks. These added resources will allow classes to be more flexible and relevant than just working through a single textbook.

Advice: Review and consider borrowing materials from MCAEL's instructional materials and professional development library and/or attend the MCAEL "More Learning, Less Teaching" training and receive a complimentary set of realia — items related to real life outside the classroom such as money, tools, consumer goods—for classroom use.

Finally, consider using Curriculum and Instructional Materials Standard 2E from *Standard for Adult Education Programs* as the guiding principle for materials selection:

Curriculum and instructional materials are easily accessible, up to date, appropriate for adult learners, culturally sensitive, oriented to the language and literacy needs of the learners, and suitable for a variety of learning styles (TESOL, 2003, p.79).

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