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## Alternative Source Material - Using Supplementary Text to Develop Communication in the Language Classroom

V. Vasanthi, Ph.D.

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### Abstract

This article speaks about the need for an alternative source material to supplement the literary text in order to enhance the communication skills among the students. While maintaining that traditional syllabus cannot be done away with, it recommends various ways to generate tasks with the use of these alternative source materials to interest the young learners. This Research paper demonstrates a class activity with an anecdote written by the teacher to generate discussion and there by inspire the students to write.

### Introduction

Teaching Young learners has been a challenge for decades and the difficulty may be partly attributed to the unwillingness on part of the learners, the teaching methodology and so on. Many Eminent professors have compiled useful and resourceful text books laden with basic

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values that offer the students a wide range of knowledge, there by developing their vocabulary and grammar.

Teaching English Language through Literature is a wonderful concept, which when applied properly will be a veritable wholesome meal not deficient of any nutrients. But just like making a child eat the right kind of food required for his essential growth, teaching English through the traditional syllabus becomes a challenge for the teachers.

The main reason for the failure is the drudgery experienced by the students in the class room. Outstanding professors have made the task enjoyable by applying innovative methodologies. But many average teachers fail in this task due to the disinterest and loathing on part of the students towards the subject material. Even though the text book cannot cater to the individual likings of the students, choosing varied source materials which have relevance to the young learners will stimulate thought and discussion and evoke a better indulgence among the students.

On the other hand the traditional syllabus gives less scope for interaction and discussion (in the case of an average teacher) and there is a need for an alternative source material. The teaching of the four skills becomes easy and viable if the source materials are chosen in a manner so that each material teaches a specific skill or two.

However, it cannot be said that these alternative source materials can substitute a regular text book, the importance of which cannot be lost in the pursuit of innovation and which is responsible to inculcate certain values among the student community. These only act as a supplementary material to enhance the learning of four skills.

### **Different Kinds of Source Material**

While supplementing the source material, a fluid text provides scope for the teacher and the students to choose their subject material and depending on the preference of the students, the teacher may handpick these materials. They can be of any nature, a user manual or a recipe and with accordance to the interest of a particular group, different kinds of such material can be chosen. Some common source materials are discussed below.

#### **Articles**

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Using articles published in a reputed daily or a magazine is not new to the English Language Teaching. Yet the choice of the articles makes a lot of difference and it is needless to say that good articles inspire students and make them respond. Once a good article is chosen which has enough relevance and interest to a student, the tasks should be carefully planned so that the source material is not treated as yet another regular text. Short articles are more effective and in cases where a lengthy article seems to be interesting, it can be edited and used.

Another intelligent way of using articles as an alternative source material would be to assign the students the responsibility of bringing their own article to the class room. In this case the students may appreciate the democracy and may feel important and responsible while selecting them. Some general tasks can be planned in a haphazard manner after the articles are brought to the class room or the teacher may take a day or two with the articles submitted by the students.

There are chances that the student may pick the easiest one in the place of an interesting one. To tackle this, the student may be given an opportunity to conduct the activity in the class with the teacher's guidance.

### **News Stories**

News stories are different from other articles in the sense that they follow an inverted pyramid pattern where the lead, which is the most important line beyond which the readers may stop reading, comes before others. They stimulate discussion and different news stories can be collected according to the interest and aptitude of the students. News stories which stimulate an intellectual discussion on current affairs can be chosen along with those that give them enough scope to speculate, imagine and articulate. Various innovative activities can be woven around a news story using creativity. Writing a short story based on a news story dealing with a theft or murder may thrill the student and boost his adventurous spirit there by making him explore his writing skills.

### **Anecdotes**

Teaching English Language through literature has been a challenging and devouring experience especially when it comes to an interaction with the students based on certain

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problems and issues underlying life generally. Here the teacher is not a mere facilitator to acquire language but also a mentor, incorporating the logic of ‘friend philosopher and guide’.

Anecdotes according to the dictionary terms are short, interesting amusing stories about a real person or an event. They are an appropriate tool to hold the interest of the young learners. The choice of the anecdote and the tasks woven around them can take a teacher a long way in developing speaking skills of a student. Anecdotes are special because, one story links the students to another incident or a person, evoking trains of thought.

### **Interviews**

Interviews always interest the students and more so their favourite personality being interviewed increases their inquisitiveness. The interview of eminent personalities are really absorbing which sums up the celebrated and endearing personality, his life, vision, principles, likes, expectations, ideas, thoughts, grievances and suggestions. It brings the personality close to the students and makes them either defend or contradict the personality. In most cases, the personality is presented in a new perspective which may be so far unknown to the students and they may be willing to share their feelings about the same.

### **Travel Guides**

Adventure and travel excite a young learner to a great extent and the students readily cooperate and complete the tasks whenever these topics are discussed. Any extract from an advertorial in a news paper or a travel guide can be chosen and the number of tasks can be made varied and interesting for a student. These articles invoke a lot of creativity in the students. Some role plays and conversations can be attempted by the students which would provide them with some life coping skills like making calls of enquiry, bookings, reservations and so on.

### **Film Reviews**

The popularity of films need not be reinstated and the students are more than ready to speak on the issue. The structure of a film review is not important here and a mere discussion on some associate topics will take a long way in honing the four skills of the student. The tasks may not be just woven around a film review and can be variegated and even extended to

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précis writing and note-making. A note on the movies can be added to furnish the students with necessary information on the movie. A few other movies may be screened and reviews may be brought out in the class.

### **Online Sources**

We live in an era of modernisation and innovation and it cannot be denied that technology plays a very important role in learning and development. Any of these above said sources can be made available on line and in the case of a virtual classroom, the results are better as the source material can be readily accessed by the students and teacher without any difficulty. The teacher can create a blog and generate a discussion which can be carried beyond the class room with genuine interest. Written tasks can be carried out and submitted in a better way, curtailing on the possibilities of the misplacement of the stacks of paper or a notebook.

### **Some Advantages**

Some text books used in certain institutions fail to interest the students and they are common for a large number of students and provide less choice for the teacher as he cannot be assured that the lessons will interest all the students in the same manner. In the case of using alternative source material, the teacher and students pick the subject material on their choice and the teacher can know the pulse of the students after trying a few source materials in the class.

A printed text book instils a fear among the students and its absence is welcomed by most students. Moreover the learning takes place in a student- friendly fashion where no memorising is required.

They offer variety in a language class room by way of discussion of all and sundry; the plight of an orphaned child in the street, the scandals happening in various institutions, the trends in fashion, technology and the box office status of various movies.

They have more relevance to a student than Shelley or Shakespeare and thus students react and respond in an interactive and competitive way to the topics discussed in the class room.

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## **Removings Some Blocks**

Some problems, nevertheless will taunt the teacher and these may be owing to several reasons

The time, freedom and effort on the part of the teacher determine the success in training a particular set of students with language and skills. In most of the cases the young learners seem to be disinterested in the class however resourceful and talented the teacher may be. If this problem has to be solved, a change in the assessment pattern should assist the teacher in the class room to carry out the activities. In many autonomous institutions, two written continuous assessments are administered and an assignment is usually submitted. The assignment or the third component gives freedom to the teacher in assessment. Though it is only a small percentage, yet it can be exploited to the maximum by the teacher.

This alternative source material can be used as a tool for testing as part of a third component ( In some colleges the internal assessment comprises of one or two tests based on the text book and a third component) or a text for an elective with limited hours aiming to provide some skills to the students.

The assessment plays an important role in the student participation. The traditional mode of written assessment, testing the ability of the students on how well they could remember the content is a big handicap, which gives less choice to the teacher in testing. The tasks discussed at the end of the source material can be made to be completed by the students and the assessment can be taken care of as well. One of the drawbacks is that the fear of performance makes the students nervous in this case and a reassurance by the teacher and a lenient valuation are mandatory to make this alternative source material a success.

## **Illustration**

The source material that has been used for illustration is an anecdote. This particular material may interest women students as it deals with the transformation of a girl into a woman, her sympathy towards a tragedy turning into empathy as her life changes. The tasks woven around this anecdote pave way for discussion and creative writing.

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## **Anecdote**

It was just one of our summer vacations and we were as excited as ever. I don't remember exactly the year it happened and the particular journey from Madras to Tanjavur, as many such journeys overlap my memory. The other events that happened during the vacation do not stand out in my memory except this one. Like other vacations, we must have worried our grandmother, played with our friends in the village, and run to the temples for Prasadham and dipped in the patches of Cauvery not minding the buffaloes which were on the other end. This was an unforgettable incident that happened on the day after a special function in our village for which people had gathered from other towns. The small village was bustling with people and we were dressed up for the occasion as usual with a Pavadai, Chattai and Rettai pinnal with Malli and Kanakambaram flowers. Grabbing every one's attention was a baby girl called Ramya, of around 5 years, who was prattling throughout the event and endearing everybody. The next morning was a fateful and black Monday that no one in that village would ever forget. The small girl Ramya had died due to a venomous sting of a strange insect called 'Jalсандhi'. Our mother ordered us to stay in the house and attended the funeral. The house of the deceased was thronged by people who were Crying and wailing and expressing their grief. They were talking of the remote possibility of the poisonous insect making its way into the house, the gruesome fate and the god without mercy. We, as children did not empathize with the victims and with a numbness, crowded around the house to get a glimpse of the happenings inside the house and waited to see with some strange inquisitive nature, the baby girl being carried out. We were totally 'unfeeling' and the scene we witnessed did not make us cry but got glued into our memory like a photograph which stays even today. The father of the child was carrying her in his arms and she was beautifully dressed with an exquisite dress with Malli and Kanakambaram flowers adorning her side knot. This scene still stays in my mind and when I grew up I realised that the intensity of emotions increased during several stages of my growing up and finally the mute scene which had stayed passive for long was re evoked in my memory after I had become a mother. I had left my daughter unattended for some time and when I came back to her, saw a strange insect which looked like a spider that had

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crawled into her sheets mysteriously. I held my baby close to my bosom not wanting to lose her and that moment I knew what it would have been for Ramya's parents.

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### Notes

1. Prasadham- Food offered at the temple after a portion of it being served to the deity.
2. Pavadai and chattai- a long skirt and a blouse
3. Rettai pinnal- a double plait
4. Malli - Jaasmine flowers
5. Kanakambaram- a kind of flower in the colour of brick red without fragrance.

### Tasks

1. Recall some of your summer vacations filled with fun and excitement.
2. The biggest danger of life is that certain disasters strike suddenly and ruthlessly. Carry out an extempore on this topic.
3. Some scenes never leave the mind and stay in the subconscious to influence people. How far do you think this is true? Do you have any such incident to report?
4. Sympathy and empathy are two different things. Comment.
5. How does the imagery of the flowers worn in the hair create trains of thought to this speaker?
6. Attempt writing an anecdote on any unforgettable incident in your life.

### Conclusion

Thus, it can be inferred from this article that using alternative source material provides a new dimension to the language class room by bringing in variety and fun and motivating the students to write. If creative writing should be developed among students, source materials should be chosen carefully and innovatively to excite them and move them to action.

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