

Supplementing Secondary EFL Textbooks: A Practical, Task-Based Methodology

중등 영어교과서보완을 위한 과제중심의 실용적 방법론

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Abstract

This paper explores how EFL teachers at secondary level can supplement their English textbooks by designing meaningful, enjoyable, relevant and effective learning materials. It is suggested that teachers can design activities specifically for the learning needs of their students, and that these can build upon the aims and methods of the textbooks, rather than conflicting with them. By creating student-centered learning materials that promote positive affect (confidence, motivation, reduction of anxiety), teachers can achieve syllabus goals by helping their students to become more motivated and effective learners. This paper therefore examines briefly some principles of task design, and then offers practical examples of how textbook supplementation might be carried out.

I. Introduction

In line with other improvements in the education system (e.g. decreasing class sizes), English textbooks are gradually becoming more pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate, though they remain largely skills-based and continue to treat language-learning in a linear, discrete (decontextualized) fashion. Teachers who want to adapt these books to the needs of their students are faced with the problem of supplementing them in ways that are meaningful, enjoyable, and relevant. This paper explores how teacher-designed activities that address the special learning needs of the students can build on the aims and methods of the textbooks, rather than conflicting with them.

The criteria for learning mentioned in the previous paragraph are not simple “feel-good” factors, chosen to entertain students and take their mind off the “real” task of passing various high-stakes tests. Research has shown that meaning and relevance are strong determiners of learning, and that a well-informed, extrinsically-motivated student will actively learn what he/she sees as important (meaningful). Stern (1983) has also shown that affective factors

(confidence, motivation, attitudes to learning, anxiety) are more important to the learning process than cognition. By focusing on these factors in supplementary tasks, therefore, teachers can help their students to participate actively and more effectively in learning.

Well-designed supplementary materials can thus greatly enhance learning, since they are made *for* the specific learning needs of specific students, *by* the people who have been trained to identify those needs. But how are teachers to set about such supplementation? Where can they find criteria for pedagogically sound task-design? How can they be sure that they are helping the students? How can they find the time to make materials? This paper focuses on the first of these questions, taking the textbook *High School English* (Bae, 2001) as its source.

II. Task-based Supplementation

There is little space in this paper to investigate the various task classifications that have been made by various researchers. Instead, these are presented below in tabular form (table 1). Table 1 distinguishes between static/one-way and dynamic/two-way tasks, and offers representative activities in terms of discovery tasks, experience tasks, guided tasks, shared tasks and independent tasks. These divisions are flexible and often overlapping; activities can be described as belonging to various categories, depending on the context and the manner in which they are used. When making materials to supplement textbooks, a normal sequence of activities might progress from the top left corner of the table to the bottom right, moving from static to dynamic activities, one-way to two-way activities, and from discovery tasks to independent tasks, as the students become more familiar with the learning content, and more competent in using that content in interactive and collaborative work in the classroom (and independent work outside the classroom)

For further discussion on task classification, task sequencing, and task content, the reader is referred to Candlin, 1987; Nation, 1990; Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997; and Willis, 1996.

II.1. Task Types

There is little space in this paper to investigate the various categories of tasks that have been made by various researchers. Instead, a list of task-characteristics is offered (Appendix A), and the reader is referred to Nation (1990) and Foster & Skehan (1996) for further description and

explanation. In this context, table 1 (below) (Finch, 1999) offers a summary of task-types, from static to dynamic, and from experience tasks to independent tasks.

Types of Tasks	Static (one-way)	Dynamic (two-way)
Experience tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memory games • review activities (one-way) • simple lexis activities (grammar and vocabulary) • questionnaires (one-way) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brainstorming • review activities (two-way) • basic interviews • questionnaires (two-way) • storytelling
Guided tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using classroom English • structural activities (drills) • comprehension activities • dictation activities • role-plays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discovery activities • group project-work • dramas
Shared tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pair-work (information gap, information transfer) • group-work (information gap, information transfer) • tasks about class members • simple dialogs • language games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pair-work (e.g. interviews) • group-work (problem-solving, opinion-gap) • jigsaw activities • surveys • pyramid activities • role-plays & simulations • error-correction • peer-assessment • discussions
Independent tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • homework • self-study (books, internet) • self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independent projects • writing to an email pal

Table 1: Checklist of task-types (Finch, 1999).

II.2. Sequencing Tasks

A number of writers (e.g. Skehan 1998; Skehan and Foster 1997); have commented on the need for a structured sequence of tasks in the classroom, rather than the disconnected and

directionless mixture of game-like activities that can result from an uninformed application of task-based ideas. Task difficulty is important in this structuring, and Candlin (1987) offers a checklist of considerations:

1. One-way tasks should come before two-way tasks;
2. Static tasks should come before dynamic ones;
3. "Present time" tasks should come before ones using the past or the future;
4. Easy tasks should come before difficult tasks;
5. Simple tasks (only one step) should come before complex tasks (many steps).

II.3. Task Content

Willis (1996) offers five principles for the implementation of a task-based approach. These provide input, use, and reflection on the input and use:

1. There should be exposure to worthwhile and authentic language.’
2. There should be use of language.
3. Tasks should motivate learners to engage in language use.
4. There should be a focus on language at some points in a task cycle.
5. The focus on language should be more and less prominent at different times. (Adapted from Willis 1996)

Skehan (1998) also proposes five principles for task-based instruction:

1. Choose a range of target structures.
2. Choose tasks which create appropriate conditions for learning.
3. Select and sequence tasks to achieve balanced development.
4. Maximize the chances of a focus on form in the context of meaningful language use.
5. Use cycles of accountability. Get learners to self-assess regularly. (Adapted from Skehan 1998, pp.129-32)

III. Practical Examples

Taking an example from *High School English* (page 86), we find a reading passage about schoolchildren visiting North Korea. Although the book is organized according to the traditional skills-based approach (separate sections on Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking), there is a good deal of cultural sensitivity apparent, as students are invited to use

the target language to describe their own culture. Aspects of meaning and authenticity are thus in evidence in this text.

The first page of the reading text (Appendix B) shows us, however, that the presentation has changed little from earlier models, and that there is no opportunity for students or teachers to interact with the text, to discover meaning, and to make the text their own. The teacher is presented with a text-heavy page of the target language, with suggested vocabulary and phrases at the bottom. How is he/she to proceed? The normal expectation is for teachers and students to wade through the text, translating word for word, in the approved grammar-translation manner. We must ask, however, how such an approach can succeed in motivating the students, or in giving them a view of English as a meaningful, living language. After all, their task is to translate everything into Korean, and they might reasonably ask why the passage wasn't written in Korean in the first place, since this would have saved them a lot of trouble. We cannot expect our students to give English much significance outside of being an examination subject, in this situation, since its role is simply that of a poor relation to the mother tongue. They are not expressing themselves in English, or learning things that can only be learned through the use of the target language.

Having voiced this dilemma, Appendix C shows us how the text might be transformed into a student-centered discovery activity (cf. table 1, above). Firstly, the instructions are addressed to the student, and need no teacher-explanation. In this manner, we are involving the students in the learning process. Secondly, students (in pairs) are given broken-up sentences from the text, and are asked to reconstruct these sentences. This can occur as a pre-reading activity, or as a post-reading activity, depending on the preferences of the teacher, and on the learning needs of the students. Once pairs have constructed their sentences (speaking/listening; discussion in English, critical thinking, problem-solving), they write them on their worksheet (writing) and talk to other pairs in order to construct the first two paragraphs. Paragraph 3 is then given to individuals in sentence-strip form, for them to dictate to each other, and to put in sequence (speaking/listening, classroom language; structure). Students have now made the first three paragraphs of the reading text. By the end of this series of activities, students have constructed the first three paragraphs of the text interactively (asking each other for information), using problem-solving skills, communication skills, peer-dictation (listen and write), comprehension gambits ("What did you say?") and peer-error correction. The students now "own" the text, having constructed it together, and having discovered its meaning together.

Appendix D shows another way of making the text more meaningful to its readers. In this activity, students are given postcards of places in North Korea, and are invited to fill in the

postcards, and to mail them to their friends and relatives. This activity promotes interest in the content of the text, and encourages students to find information about the places shown on the postcards, so that they can write about them.

As mentioned above, the original text (page 86) has suggested vocabulary at the bottom of each page. There is no suggestion as to how to go about internalizing such vocabulary, however. Appendix E shows a teacher-friendly and student-friendly way of going about this. In this appendix, the suggested vocabulary has been made into a pair-work crossword, and students are invited to explain the terms to each other. This activity is very effective in helping students to acquire the vocabulary, since the task of explaining the meaning of the words to another student requires that they comprehend those meanings themselves, and that they transfer the meanings in successful communication with their peers. The crossword in appendix E was made using free shareware, downloaded from <http://www.crosswordkit.com>

Appendix F shows the same vocabulary, this time incorporated into a word search puzzle. The activity is less communicative this time, since the task is simply to find the words given in the vocabulary list at the side. However, this can be an affective format for individual studying of required vocabulary (homework). The wordsearch in appendix E was made using free shareware, downloaded from <http://www.wordsearchkit.com>

IV. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that teachers can successfully design and use language learning materials for their classrooms, despite the requirements of the test-driven classroom. By making materials which supplement the textbooks in use, they can promote meaning, relevance, authenticity, and creativity, through a student-centered, interactive approach to learning. The benefit of this approach is not just that students will appreciate the learning experience more, but that increased motivation and the reduction of affective filters will lead to improved learning per se.

The examples offered in this paper appear on the internet, along with online task-based conversation books, which educators are welcome to download: www.finchpark.com/books .

References:

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Appendix A: Task types

Category 1: “Information-gap”, "Information-transfer" and “Opinion-gap’ tasks:

- a) **Information-gap tasks:** (pair-work)
- Missing information is asked for and supplied by different students;
 - Information flows in one direction ("what time is the next bus?");
 - Language is usually simple and can be based on a mode("Have you ever ...?");
 - The task is over when the information has filled in;
 - There is often a focus on form.
- b) **Information-transfer tasks:** (text-to-graphs, tables-to-graphs)
- Information is transferred from one place to another, often changing format. E.g. the information in a table is used to make a graph; information in a text is put into a table;
 - Students have to find key words and ideas;
 - Language is based on the text, but there is room for the students to make their own questions and answers.

c) **Opinion-gap tasks:** (discussions, role-plays, interviews)

- Authentic problems promote personal responses;
- Language is unpredictable;
- The students' language is used;
- Students' opinions are important;
- There is no focus on form.
- There is little focus on errors.

Category 2: “Static” and “Dynamic’ tasks:

a) **static tasks:** (e.g. questionnaires, surveys, pair-work)

- simple one-way transfer of information ("Where is the book?" "On the table");
- students learn new content in a controlled (and "safe") learning environment;
- the language is controlled (from the teacher);
- the language is predictable;
- errors are easy to identify and to repair (consistent structures);
- there is often a focus on form;
- the interaction finishes after the answer to the question.

b) **dynamic tasks:** (e.g. free-talking, role-plays, discussions)

- the transfer of information can happen in many directions
- the language is made by the students;
- the language is not predictable;
- errors are only repaired if they interrupt communication;
- the transfer of information can continue for some time;
- communication is more important than grammatical accuracy;
- many forms can be used.

Category 3: “One-way” and “Two-way” tasks:

c) **one-way tasks:**

- usually static;
- information flows in one direction;
- there is no need to continue the interaction;
- the language is predictable;
- the language often follows a mode(e.g. "What time is it?", "What time is the movie?" "How many people in the class like ice-cream?");
- there is often a focus on form.

d) **two-way tasks:** (e.g. brainstorming, role-plays, simulations, discussions)

- often dynamic;

- information flows in more than one direction (questioner and responder);
- the language is unpredictable;
- many forms can be used;
- communication is important.

Category 4: "experience tasks", shared tasks", "guided tasks", "independent tasks":

e) experience tasks: (memory games, pre-task activities, brainstorming)

- these are often static, but dynamic, one-way or two-way tasks can be used;
- the learner's previous language-learning is important (e.g. memory games);
- the student becomes aware of the language that he already possesses;
- the student uses previous language-learning for new language;
- little or no focus on form;
- little or no focus on errors;
- a learning "schema" is made for the new language.

f) guided tasks:

- usually static (sometimes dynamic), one-way or two-way
- these support the students while they perform the task;
- they use predictable language;
- exercises are simple and can be based on a mode;
- exercises are often focused on form;
- exercises are often focused on errors;

g) shared tasks: (pair-work, group-work, class surveys, jigsaw activities)

- static or dynamic, one-way or two-way;
- cooperative learning strategies are encouraged;
- learners help each other (e.g. pair work, group work);
- learners correct each other.

h) independent tasks:

- usually dynamic, two-way;
- learners work alone (without the teacher);
- the teacher offers help in planning, etc.;
- language is unpredictable (e.g. discussions, projects);
- the teacher is a language resource;
- the student develops learning strategies;
- self-assessment is important.

Appendix B: A Trip to the North

A Trip to the North



Q When did the class depart?

Monday, May 18, 20--

This was the first day of my class' three-day train trip to Gaeseong and Pyeongyang. The whole class was excited to travel on a track which had been reconnected across the Imjingang in 2001. We departed at 8:00 in the morning and arrived at Gaeseong at 1:30. Our plans were to visit the old Goryeo's capital for one day and then spend two days in Pyeongyang, the ancient heart of Goguryeo. Pyeongyang is important to me because my grandmother was born and spent her childhood there. We ate lunch on the train as we were crossing the Imjingang.

depart[dipɑ:rt] track[træk] reconnect[ri:kənekt] capital[kæpitəl]

4: three-day train trip 2박 3일의 기차 여행 7: Our plans were to visit ~. = We were going to visit ~. 11: as we were crossing ~ = when we were crossing ~

Appendix C: Strip Story



1. Pairs:

- The teacher will give you some cards with words on them.
- Put the cards in sequence to make a sentence.
- Write the sentence in your books. (What is the paragraph number for your sentence?)

2. Individually: Ask other people for their sentences. Write them in your book.

3. Groups: Find a sequence for all the sentences.


Paragraph 1 sentence:				
Paragraph 1 sentence:				
Paragraph 1 sentence:				
Paragraph 1 sentence:				
Paragraph 1 sentence:				
Paragraph 1 sentence:				
of	and	day	three-day	trip
This	first	the	class'	my
was	Gaesong	to	Pyeongyang	Paragraph 1

Paragraph 3

I felt sad when I looked at it, but I'm glad it is still there because it reminds me of history.
As I walked across the bridge, I tried to imagine the scene on that day.
It is said that several green bamboos appeared after the assassination.
The bridge involves a sad story which served as a historical turning point.
After Seonggyungwan we visited the Seonjukgyo, located over a small river about 1km east of downtown.
Jeong Mongju, a scholar loyal to the Goryeo Dynasty, was assassinated on the bridge by scholars loyal to General Lee Seonggye.
Seonjukgyo is one of the oldest stone bridges now in Korea.


Appendix D: Postcards from North Korea

A postcard from




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A postcard from



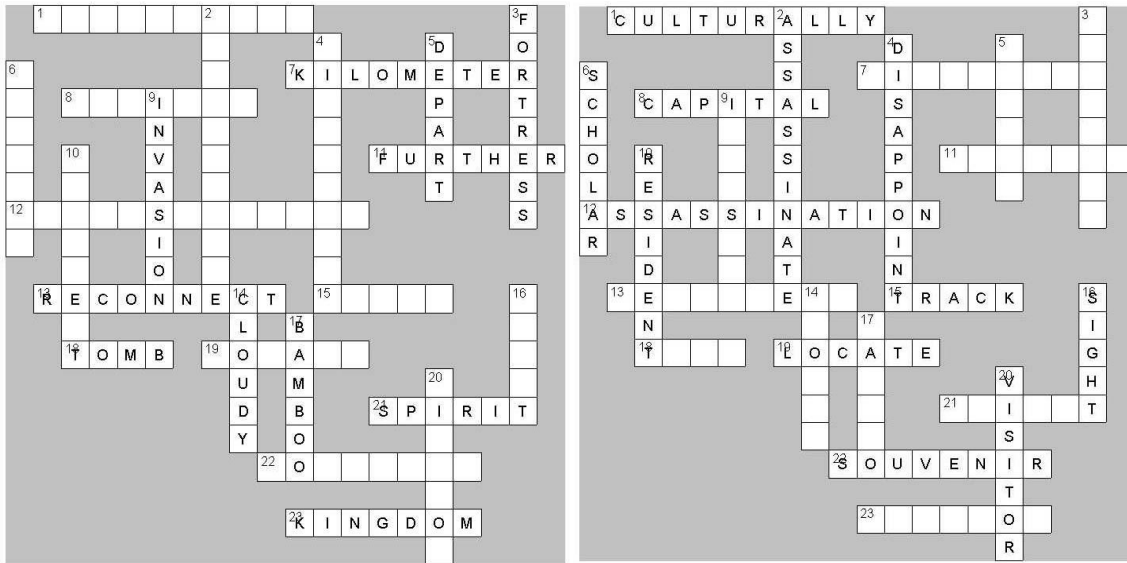
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A postcard from



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Appendix E: Vocabulary Crossword (A & B)



Appendix F: Vocabulary Wordsearch

<p style="text-align: center;">D H E A K R</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Q I K S G E Q C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A N C U L T U R A L L Y</p> <p style="text-align: center;">H D S F O R T R E S S O K B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">L F C S I G H T R S O U I A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O S A K A D C Y E A U D N M</p> <p style="text-align: center;">C D P V I S Z B C S V Y G B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A E I I T L S Y O S E F D O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">T P T S R O O I N I N U O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E A A I A I M M N N I R M Z</p> <p style="text-align: center;">R L T C P T B E A R T L</p> <p style="text-align: center;">T F O K W P N C T T H D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V R C E Z O T I E E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Q I N V A S I O N R</p> <p style="text-align: center;">R E S I D E N T</p> <p style="text-align: center;">S C H O L A R T</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N R H G</p>	<p>assassinate</p> <p>assassination</p> <p>bamboo</p> <p>capital</p> <p>cloudy</p> <p>culturally</p> <p>depart</p> <p>disappoint</p> <p>fortress</p> <p>further</p> <p>invasion</p> <p>kilometer</p> <p>kingdom</p> <p>locate</p> <p>reconnect</p> <p>resident</p> <p>scholar</p> <p>sight</p> <p>souvenir</p> <p>spirit</p> <p>tomb</p> <p>track</p> <p>visitor</p>
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