

“It’s not that some people have willpower and some don’t. It’s that some people are ready to change and others are not.”

James Gordon, M.D.

Supplementary Materials in ELT

This chapter talks about supplementary materials which refresh our classroom “chores”.

No matter how colourful the English textbooks are nowadays, they become boring one day as they are present in the lesson every day and pupils have touched them so many times. No wonder that children expect anything new, amusing and attractive. Let’s have a look at what the teacher can offer.

Books are a good source of material. The teacher can use a book of the month. He/she reads a part from the book every lesson, explains things using pictures, gestures, miming with the system “to be continued”. If there is a small English bookcase in the classroom, children can search in the books themselves. A library is one of the best ways for learners to acquire a wide experience of foreign language reading. Just the teacher has to advertise reading and motivate pupils. It is also very useful to have a collection of reference books, extra textbooks and teachers’ handbooks available to refresh teacher’s own work and update his/her thinking. Professional journals are read because of the similar reason.

Pictures, posters, maps and cards are invaluable for learners. In the age of computers they are still widely used and they constantly serve as a good stimulus in ELT with pupils.

This type of material is usually very cheap as it mostly can be home-made. Teachers either draw the pictures themselves, prepare flashcards or they may use magazines, advertising leaflets as an excellent source of pictures. The second ones are sometimes not preferably focused on a particular thing. Children usually find something “interesting“ in the background of the picture and keep the teacher ready all the time. Unlike modern technology this group of supplementary material is reliable and they do not ruin your lesson because of breakdown, electricity failure or bulbs burning down.

Pupils can create some suitable materials themselves. Thus English can be interconnected with arts. Pupils can make pictures, masks, hats puppets, models of streets or buildings etc., inspired by the places and characters in the texts they read.

Real authentic material brings fresh air into the classroom, too. Leaflets for tourists advertising some British beauties can be of real use. Pupils can scan the text and find necessary information (opening times, admission discounts, refreshment rooms available or whereabouts the place is situated). Timetables, entrance tickets, menus, advertisements air, bus or railway tickets and real photographs can be very attractive for children. Some of them will gladly bring the thing themselves as there are more and more children nowadays who travel with their parents and various organizations.

Overhead projectors are the group of school technology which is being enlarged with new types of visualizers every year. They enable to present pictures or written material to classes. The teachers can prepare the displays in advance and thus they save time in the lesson (but not during your lesson planning). Anyhow they are vivid and attention-catching compared to black or whiteboards.

Video equipment used sometimes just to survive the last lessons before school holidays is in fact an excellent source of real spoken language. It is attractive and motivating. Thanks to the fact that it is flexible it offers a variety of activities. You can run forward or back. You can start and stop it. You can freeze it to talk about the passage. You can switch the sound off and ask the pupils to guess the dialogue. You can switch the picture off and let the pupils talk about the situation in the dark screen. When planning a video lesson, have an alternative lesson ready as the video-player is just dependent on electricity and might not always fulfil your wishes.

Audio equipment is usually a user-friendly device. Cassette recorders and cassettes are relatively cheap and they are the main source of the language spoken by native speakers. They are portable and easy to use. Unfortunately firms hardly ever produce the equipment with a counter which would save much time in the lesson.

Computer! Not being “computerate” (computer literate) is like having just one hand nowadays. Pupils are more skilful with the computer than the teacher sometimes and most of them really like the computers. This is a good chance for the English teacher to take advantage of the PC and enrich his/her lessons. There are many websites where suitable materials are available. Just the lesson could be rather short since a lot of time in a computer lesson goes on setting up programs, getting pupils into them, and then solving problems with moving in the program (not mentioning the time needed to train both teachers and pupils to use PCs).

If you have not found anything special so far, just go shopping. In toy-shops and stationeries there are numbers of unconventional teaching aids. You only have to enter the shop with creative and inventive eyes. If you are not willing to spend your money here then DIY (do it yourself) is a solution. A home made small pillow or a puppet is lovelier than a plastic one, isn't it?

When using supplementary material we need to consider how best it can be used to contribute to our everyday struggling in lessons, to our pupils' learning. It should be integrated into our plan of work.