

# Criteria to Guide Textbook Decisions: Reflections from a Classroom Teacher and Teacher Trainer

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[Abstract] Based on my years of experience as a classroom teacher and teacher trainer and guided by some of the textbook review and adoption guidelines currently being used in the United States, I first describe the problems with current textbooks and then explain the kind of textbooks teachers and school districts are looking for. First of all, ideal textbooks should be interesting to students. They need to pay close attention to the principles of second language acquisition, to focus on communication rather than grammar, to provide authentic tasks that are real and meaningful, to integrate language and culture, to use age and level appropriate authentic materials, to include performance-based assessments, to focus on target language use, to have interdisciplinary connections to other school subjects, to pay attention to learner variables and differentiation of instruction, to provide and teach learning strategies, to demonstrate intercultural sensitivity among many other factors. In short, ideal textbooks should provide support and guide teachers to become facilitators of language learning in a student-centered classroom.

[Key words] ideal textbooks; SLA; problems with current textbooks

## Introduction

As a teacher trainer and classroom teacher in the USA over 18 years of experience

constantly in  
 communicative  
*Learning in the*  
 Like me, many  
 thematic units with  
 their stated  
 level appropriate  
 of program,  
 unfortunately, it  
 especially for K-12

critical moment for  
 book producing  
 “百家争鸣”  
 (d). In other  
 relation to what  
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books and then  
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*evaluation Form*

Materials” in  
*ing the Match:*  
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the United States,  
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 Contemporary Life,  
 and Science and

ask questions in the  
 Bias, Flexibility,  
*New Languages*

book Review Guide, Gwinnett County,

project. *Mandarin Instructional Material Selection*  
University, School of Education, 2009.

*Integrating Instructional Materials for Social Content.*  
Department of Education, 2000.

highlight that it is important for textbooks  
to provide communication rather than grammar,  
to integrate language and culture, and to  
among many other factors.

Chinese textbooks since they offer do not  
theory and the current best practices in  
Following is a list of some specific issues

students.  
rather than communicative functions, so  
rather than contextualized.

ulation of the instructional objectives in  
that students can understand and appreciate the  
of real-life communication in the target

provide sufficient opportunities for students to use  
to accomplish real life, meaningful tasks.  
materials lack sufficient input in terms of reading  
there are not enough opportunities for students

materials that help instructors provide differentiated  
previous vocabulary and language functions

in the teacher's guide to provide concrete examples  
of varying proficiency levels.

on in English and do not have sufficient support for  
the language and culture.

authentic tasks, nor authentic and real

and teach students learning strategies  
critical thinking skills. They usually do not  
support and reinforce key concepts and

knowledge students gained

- They do not use enough
- Sometimes, they lack

The next section of this ideal Chinese textbook. Most reflect the best practices in

## Ideal Textbook And Support

Activities must be placed in and place it in negotiate meaning with especially important to provide of all group members. In students are having fun and

In a student-centered classroom Teacher acts as the facilitator embedded environment for knowledge of the target culture

Different from a teacher students mostly repeat and talking and doing in Chinese instruction while in a student teacher acts as a facilitator cultural competence. To understand how to swim in the water coach. On the other hand, the water while students watch

## Ideal Textbook Principles

Benjamin Rifkin's analysis help in informing the textbook According to some of the opportunities to listen to a competence (Krashen's importance of such "compr

ained in the  
and they must  
acquisition.

access the  
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### Effective Communicative Tasks

### Meaningful, Purposeful, Tasks

tasks and engage students in meaningful communication. M. Ask...

students. Reasonable tasks should be similar to those often encountered in the real world. Recent research in second language acquisition and pedagogy. Lightbown and Spada's research leads to a number of key principles for designing grammar drills.

ideal textbook need to be. There must be something for students to want to do it. It should have relevance to lives. should require students to do those often encountered in the real world. Recent research in second language acquisition and pedagogy. Lightbown and Spada's research leads to a number of key principles for designing grammar drills.

analysis of the text. These activities should be meaningful and communicative. mechanical drills are not recommended. manipulation of language forms is only for substitution.

each learner are required to. She provides us with four types of meaningful drills, communicative drills, and mechanical drills. learners do not have to understand the meaning of the drills. mechanical examples are provided.

each learner are required to. She provides us with four types of meaningful drills, communicative drills, and mechanical drills. learners do not have to understand the meaning of the drills. mechanical examples are provided.

says: An example...  
says: This...  
says: A...  
says: Th...  
says: A...

says: An example...  
says: This...  
says: A...  
says: Th...  
says: A...

says: An example...  
says: This...  
says: A...  
says: Th...  
says: A...

student says: This is a watermelon.  
 do not need to understand the meaning of  
 and the meanings of input and output in  
 mechanical drills, in the meaningful drills, there  
 is no authentic answer. Here is an

from one of the four choices:

- 学生说: Student says:
- 你吃点儿饭吧。 Go and get something to eat.
- 你坐一会儿吧。 Take a seat for a while.
- 你去睡一会吧。 Go and sleep for a while.
- 你喝儿点水吧。 Go and drink some water.

difference between meaningful and communicative drills is:  
 for which there is  
 responses produced. Unlike meaningful activities, communicative drill  
 for all participants, the response of a communicative drill  
 is new and unknown to the person presenting the prompt, so  
 prompt. However, like meaningful drills, communicative drills  
 are in a structured format. Part of the activity is prompted, but the  
 initiative and creativity of the students" (60).

of a communicative drill:

- Teacher: Do you like to eat fruits?
- Student: I like fruits.
- Teacher: What fruit do you like to eat?
- Student: I like to eat watermelon.

of textbook activity that can be most helpful for learners to  
 go beyond the formulaic  
 communicative language practice, which moves beyond the formulaic  
 meaningful, and communicative drills. Instead, it requires, first  
 meaning in order to generate form. In other words, this is the  
 meaning. As Askie  
 ge form (structures) in the service of communicative practice: "It is not possible to answer  
 of communicative practice: "It is not possible to answer the learner in a  
 pattern to follow. The goal is to immerse the learner in a  
 the learner in a  
 or she is motivated to interact. Typical examples are task-  
 role-playing activities that give learners the opportunity to  
 freely" (61).  
 from Askie:

people and artistic works that we consider the most notable of  
 prepare a list of categories. Then, with the whole class,  
 each category and vote for your favorites."

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and integrated approach  
 materials from the real world  
 travel agency, and other  
 authentic texts include native  
 language textbooks for  
 Chinese speaking world. Other  
 materials include audio  
 and video recordings of  
 real life situations.

An extensive use of  
 and culture in such a way  
 provided so that students  
 resources with authentic  
 photos, drawings, maps,  
 and audio and video  
 materials is then integrated  
 in the materials program  
 (2007). According to the  
 language program, the  
 materials should be

Challenging to some  
 and at the appropriate level  
 and level appropriate  
 and then naturally  
 authentic materials can  
 influence and culture  
 learning and help  
 and accuracy in

**Authentic Materials**

When authentic

materials are used

airplane and so on), voice  
 envelops, menus, schedules for  
 am lists and schedules for  
 authentic texts include native  
 children's literature from the  
 and in the following from the  
 textbooks, Books of Simple  
 in the second language and  
 textbooks is also an important

an integration of language  
 materials and realia should be  
 the target culture through  
 photos, drawings, maps,  
 Dahlberg (2010) urge us to  
 integrated into the program  
 on learning about culture?  
 richness of cultural diversity?"  
 of language learning. As  
 a, the true content of the  
 of the language, but the  
 Dahlberg, 2008).

materials can and should be  
 our ideal textbooks is to find  
 materials. They also need to  
 and each unit. The use of  
 learners acquire language  
 meaningful contexts. These  
 ed in Chinese culture, they

**Competence-Based**

City Schools look for  
 presented within a variety of

onal, and interpretive modes are represented that;

ides for multiple methods of assessment, including portfolios, etc.

and precise links to the standards and learning goals

s to several performance-based assessments and consistent with ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) descriptions of PBAs (Performance-based Assessments) and strategies for assessing interpretive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

rics for each. ent strategies and examples, including portfolios are included.

ks seldom provide multiple ways to measure language usage. They tend to focus on the test isn't bad if it is the right kind of test, the systematic use of performance-based assessments to be used in assessing students' performance to do, not how well they can perform on a test.

focus on what students can do with the language. These assessments usually require students to complete task situations and ask them to complete task situations.

y have gained in learning the language based assessment activities based on the

Century.

and Writing—Two-way Communication)

cards, or e-mails with other students, or other class members, to provide information to fill out a form, to complete a survey, to conduct an interview, etc.

such as describing the way to a location or showing a picture.

retive mode, interpersonal mode and presentational mode. In intrapersonal mode, the speaker and/or writer clarify their meaning. Interpersonal mode is unrehearsed, and characterized by active negotiation of meaning. Presentational mode is spoken or written communication prepared for an audience. It also includes showing through visual media or technology.

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研究

One-way Communication

playing "Simon Says"

retelling a story, picture

the "missing information"

comprehension activity, the

reading and/or writing

One-way Communication

that illustrates something

report about a country, for

or dialogue using pictures

Media

sounds and onomatopoeia

sports, movies, radio programs

the home culture

famous figure of the

Culture Research

learning about the target

An important barrier

each culture as much as

provides the opportunity

important to use the

target culture as much as

section I will give

ly talking about it

as well as many traditional

textbooks and teachers

can watch, listen to

examples on how to

stories, using familiar

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Don't Just Have

culture rather

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opportunities for students to experience the culture, instruction at beginning/novice level. They can be students at different ages and with varying language

powerful vehicle for experiencing culture. Values and beliefs embedded in myths and folktales can be shared through dramatization. In this way they become part of the foundation for later understanding on a deeper level. For example, a Chinese children's story, such as Kongrong Takes Care of His Blind Parents (a story about filial piety), The Little Carp Jump the Dragon (a story about perseverance), and The Little Carp Jump the Dragon (a story about perseverance and will for self-improvement).

extended experiences with culture in the classroom, even for students with different language backgrounds. By creating simulated fantasy scenarios in a setting that replicates important elements of the target culture, students have the opportunity to experience new feelings, new combinations of familiar problems. For example, students can take a virtual field trip to Beijing, visit historical sites and sample their favorite Chinese foods.

every kind of language activity. The stories of famous artists can encourage them to learn more about the artist's work. Teachers have focused on the work of a single artist and students create their own style in their own creations. This focus could serve as a model that integrates.

Integrating language and culture are found in Chapter 4 of *Contextualized Language Instruction* (2010).

Look at a scene from the target culture (e. g. a street scene from a magazine advertisement and discuss the possible perspectives to which they relate);

Culture: As students learn vocabulary, they see and hear realia so that they acquire both language and cultural knowledge. For example, housing, students look at photos of various types of buildings, identify features of each building type, and compare and contrast them with housing from their own culture;

Antic maps can be used to associate word clusters with geographical locations, or conceptual maps. Words can be grouped thematically into products.

students communicate with teachers about their daily routines, responses.”(144-145)

language materials can be used. Such materials can be found in daily time less cultural values and Proverbs can be an effective way to teach many traditional Chinese values such as filial piety (孝); 义(righteousness); 信(trustworthiness) and other virtues. For example, I use “月是故乡明” to teach about deep attachment with hometown. I also teach about Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋节) and the beautiful full moon together with the Chinese family and Chinese traditions to students that for a complete family.

and for the Chinese, I use “一心, 有志者成.” They have money to buy a needle. Every day we will be able to teach culture. I use a series of pictures to tell the father demonstrates an important lesson of life. This is a story for the story.

thers), I use the proverb “你敬我一尺, 人敬我一丈.” They will show ten feet of mutual respect in Chinese society. Materials can be adapted for different levels of students and cultural products and practices to

### Connections to Other School Subjects

K-12 textbooks should provide content in both the National Standards and State Standards for Language Arts. 3.1 Students reinforce

discipline through the foreign language.” (“Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century”) and the redesigned AP curriculum themes of interdisciplinary connections for the future of world languages in the United States. Unfortunately, few of the currently available textbooks used these interdisciplinary connections.

## 2. Textbooks Pay Attention to Learner Variables and Differentiation

Textbooks need to include a variety of activities that inherently and more specifically address the issue of learner variables in the contexts of ability, readiness, and learning style. This is very important since many textbook adoption policies “... feature a range of instructional activities that meet the diverse needs of all learners” and “Allow for more able learners to progress at a faster pace” (“Mandarin Instructional Material”).

Textbooks would be able to meet the “Learning Strategies and Critical Thinking” criteria of Gwinnett County’s Modern and Classical Languages Textbook Review. The review suggests criteria for the type of textbooks that help teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Here are some helpful criteria for evaluating textbooks:

- Textbooks provide learners with strategies to help them be successful language learners.
- Textbooks include a variety of individual, paired, small group, and large group learning activities.
- Textbooks include activities for more advanced and motivated students.
- Textbooks include activities for more students with less prior background knowledge.
- Textbooks include activities for students with learning disability).
- Textbooks include suggestions for addressing a variety of learning styles.
- Textbooks include activities that challenge higher-level thinking skills are included.

## Textbooks Provide and Teach Learning Strategies

Textbooks should provide and teach strategies for learners to learn and engage with the engaging aspects of the core curriculum and make progress in their learning through the use of the target language in the classroom both for our current students and future learners. Since strategies to scaffold instruction in order to facilitate student understanding and mastery of the core curriculum through the target language is essential to the success of the language program, the following are some strategies that should be included in the textbook practice.

Some strategies that should be included are more specific listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies

ning.

## Intercultural Sensitivity

*Journal Materials for Social Content*  
This language textbook: intercultural  
“Male and Female Roles”, “Ethnic  
Gift”, “Brand Names and Corporate  
the need to represent cultures in  
explains the specific requirements in  
the Chinese textbook writers might  
names and business logos and may  
to become more aware of these

the teachers to become facilitators of  
They should incorporate real-life texts  
and curriculum content. In a sense,  
the use of culturally rich authentic  
all been looking for in seamlessly  
kind of authenticity that teachers  
books should promote and facilitate  
and meaningful as well as age and  
e-based assessments that measure  
language use. I realize that this is an  
mentioned in the article will be of

Keeping Pace with Second Language

*Journal Material Selection Rubric*. Stanford,

*and Children: Making the Match*: New  
n: Pearson, 2010.  
from Gwinnett County, Georgia.

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