

Running with Scissors: Authenticity in the Classroom

Emily Gale BBC Worldwide ELT Editor

Philip Warwick Wider World Series Editor

Although teachers often indicate a preference for authentic materials in the classroom, there is debate on the use of authenticity in language classrooms and confusion on the extent to which they might be used in terms of tasks, materials, and situations. This session draws on the authentic materials Pearson and BBC used in creating Wider World, and why.

Authenticity of task questions whether students are engaged in activities aimed at learning language in a way that would appear natural outside the classroom context. Authenticity of materials covers a continuum that begins with inauthentic materials (wholly created by a teacher or materials developer) to constructed materials (often modified/simplified from real-world materials), to completely authentic materials (created for non-pedagogical purposes for use by native English speakers). Authenticity of situation refers to non-classroom contexts normally encountered by native speakers and non-native speakers alike. Complicating ideas of authenticity are questions of identification and selection of materials; although teachers may prefer authentic materials, they often curate their choices of them in the classroom, for example selecting an easier-to-read tabloid newspaper over more intellectually-challenging newspapers with a higher degree of technical language.

This session explores teachers' awareness of authenticity and suggests ways to incorporate authentic tasks, materials and situations to enhance classroom learning. Drawing on examples from Wider World, we will identify and assess authentic tasks, materials, and situations for students of all ages and reflecting on how authenticity might best be included in each teacher's classroom.

Emily holds a PGCE in Primary Teaching from Kingston University where she specialised in English and a BA in English from the University of Sussex. Emily has worked as a primary school teacher in the UK as well as teaching English in China. Whilst living in Hong Kong she worked as Editor: Content and Pedagogy for BBC Worldwide to develop an ELT curriculum for young learners in China. She enjoys working with well-loved BBC content to develop engaging learning materials for the ELT classroom.

Philip has been involved in ELT since 1988, working in a variety of countries such as Italy, China, Brazil and Czechia and teaching all types of students from prep school students in a school just outside Hastings to designing materials and teaching scientific writing to Czech scientists for an EU-funded project in Brno. He's currently academic manager for a UK based summer school with centres in London, Brighton, Oxford, Cambridge and Canterbury and for an English project in Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia. In between these commitments Phil works as a teacher trainer for Pearson English, and is never happier than when he can step back inside a classroom, which he does in his friend's language school in Brno as often as time allows!

Key takeaways

- Authenticity should be broken down into the key concepts of authentic learning, authentic tasks, authentic situations, authentic materials and authentic teachers.
- Video is a perfect medium to introduce authentic situations and materials with a view to creating authentic tasks and authentic learning.
- When choosing a course book look for student-centric activities, personalization and embedded video elements throughout the units.
- Authentic learning is not just confined to the students' English proficiency, it is designed to enhance their performance in other areas (such as critical thinking and collaboration) and it is important that we see this happening in the classroom.
- Whatever is happening in a class at any moment, it should be authentic in one of the five areas outlined above.

Further Reading

- "Editorial: The Components of Authentic Learning" by Audrey Rule, Journal of Authentic Learning Volume 3, Number 1, August 2006, Pp. 1-10.
- Authentic Task-Based Materials by G.K.Oura - www.esoluk.co.uk/calling/pdf/Authentic_Task_Based_Materials.pdf
- An examination of teacher authenticity in the college classroom by Zac Johnson and Sara La Belle – Communication Education Volume 66, 2017 - [Issue 4](#)

Key links

- <https://www.pearsonelt.com/catalogue/secondary/wider-world.html>
- <http://www.pearsonelt.com.ar/catalogue-2017/primary/go-getter.html>
- <https://www.english.com/blog/the-importance-of-authentic-english>
- <https://www.pearsonelt.com/professional-development/events/iatefl.html>

Pearson English hopes to see you next year!