Welcome to the video, I'm going to interview Professor Brian Tomlinson on issues and trends in material development. Hello, I'm Hitomi Massara from the Department of English in the University of Liverpool. Okay, and here is Professor Brian Tomlinson, the founder of material Development Association and the pioneer of academic field of material development.

There we go.

Hi, everybody. Welcome to Liverpool. Okay, tell me what would you like to ask first,

what you've been working in material development around the world for a long time? What would you say was the biggest unresolved issue

whatsoever, at least four or five issues which are still unresolved? Probably the biggest one is is the course book. The value of the course book is the course book useful to the learner should teachers use ghost book. And if you look at the literature, there seem to be two polarized sides. Those in favor of the course book who say, course book provides safety and security for the learner saves time for the teacher and the learner.

It provides

professional materials which have been monitored and selected from there is a quality control. And it helps administrators to standardize their courses.

So the lots of positives.

What are the opposite side?

Only opponents of the course book say that course books, disempower teachers, that they take the decisions away from the teacher, and that they impose methodology, often an outdated methodology, which isn't really suitable for the teacher or the students.

And that

these days, a lot of people are attacking coursebooks for being bland, harmonious safe, presenting a very neutral world, which is far from the reality of language communication. But probably the biggest objection is particularly the global coursebook

which in order to cater for a very large market tries to cater for everybody, but in the end satisfies nobody.

So there is a debate of that kind, and which side would you take?

on I'm not really on either side, I've often been characterized as anti curse, but many people have accused me at conferences and articles of prime Thomas, who's anti course but I'm not anti coursebook. I think, of course, books are necessary. teachers do not have enough time expertise, resources to produce their own materials for every lesson. So it's necessary to have a course book. But of course book has a resource to make use of not a script to follow. But I have criticized a lot of specific course books for their for their failings. And in particular, the problem of the course books, not providing sufficient exposure to language in use, not providing enough opportunities for the learners to use language themselves. And the one that really gets me is not being sufficiently engaging. One of the absolute facts of SLA research is that in order to acquire a language you have to be an effective VI and cognitively engaged in learning it. Most course books to be honest, the texts are not effectively or cognitively engaging, and neither are the tasks. And if you look at most course books,

nothing much has changed over the last 40-50 years when I've been using coursebooks. The labs and the publishers claims are

claims have changed all the time. You know, we've got Natural English we've got some authentic English, we've got clever approaches. We've got all these different approaches which are advertised on the back. But if we look inside You will find it's the same old thing it's matching, it's filling in the blank, it's clear that the exercises are very closed. And the reason for that is so they can be used for tests. When I've advocated more open ended questions, publishers have said no, no, no. teachers want closed questions so they can use them for tests. So there are problems. I'm not necessarily criticizing the course writers there are constraints. But the reality is course books tend to do that. They narrow the learners opportunities.

Okay. So you mentioned the other unsolved issues, what are they?

One of them is this big question about whether it is useful to explicitly teach language to the learners to give them rules to give them generalizations to teach about the language? Or is it better for the learners to implicit they acquire it and still, they the pride army most coursebook sees explicit teaching about plus overt practice have very little exposure to language in use very little actual communication.

So what would you suggest?

I would say,

I would say that what what is really required is a rich exposure to language in use. rich, rich, meaning large in quantity, lodging, quality, varied many different genres,

and engaging perhaps,

especially engaging, meaningful to the learner. This is another problem with the course book per se. The material needs to be to have meaning for the learner to relate to their lives to relate to their previous experience to relate to their interest. And how can a course book writer do that if the writer doesn't know the learners, plus another thing, which the language they're exposed to needs to be recycled? Because curricular syllabuses are so big coursebooks need to cover it all. There is insufficient opportunity to recycle. So you get unit 10 past perfect no past perfect before you need to know past perfect after unit 10. Unit 10 past perfect crammed into it. No recycling. Of course books could do this, but they don't because it's not what is expected. face validity is important for the publisher. And I'm not criticizing the publisher that their job is to sell course books. Seems course books only really sell if they resemble previous course books, it's very difficult to change that that paradigm.

Okay. So you mentioned the problem with the curriculum, and also the distance between the writers and the users. And also publishers, constraints about making sure the cost looks make profits, etc, etc. And you mentioned the methodology about explicit teaching of the items regardless of the meaning for the learners. Do you have any, anything to say about that? Often coursebooks, use PPP, present, practice and produce. That's wrong with that. There's a

lot wrong with that. And you're right, I've analyzed coursebooks going back 40 years. And 40 years ago, 20 years ago, and still today, the prevailing paradigm is PPP. Whether it's grammar or vocab or functions, whatever it is, the book presents them provides easy practice and then provides what he calls production.

A and B get together and

arrange to meet each other next week. Use the following expressions which is not communication. It's simply practice of a particular teaching point. I would like to replace and I have replaced in my own course books. And in my teacher training, I've moved from P P P, to what I call a text driven framework.

Okay, so could you explain to me then what the text driven framework is,

it's an approach, which doesn't follow a syllabus, it creates a syllabus. So instead of starting from a predetermined teaching point, you start from what is the most important thing, which is a potentially engaging text, a text, which you think is likely to move the learners emotionally to make them laugh, to make them cry to make them excited, and in and he's likely to stimulate them to think, because it's a fact that when acquiring a language, if you want to acquire it, if you want enduring acquisition, then you need to be engaged in the process. By engaged I mean, completely absorbed. And that's the the basic premise of the text driven approach that you start with this potential absorption in the text. So you start by selecting a text, you think it's likely to engage the learners.

If I may talk about my anecdote. In my primary school days, I have various teachers and teachers told me many things, but to be honest, I don't remember anything. But some stories that they have told me,

I do remember.

And then very, very interesting text in the textbook. I do remember. So I do see your point about the importance of engaging texts,

right? And it's that text, which then drives the unit, determining the activities,

are there any sequence

yet, but but to help the writer, then there is a framework? Okay. I'll describe it very briefly. And I'll give some references which describe it in more detail. Okay. The first activity is intended to activate the learners minds. I mentioned earlier that language learning needs to be meaningful, and it needs to connect with the learners experience. So the first activity simply does that it gets them to, it activates their minds in relation to the theme or topic or location of the text. So they are thinking, not of language, but have their own experience first. So they have an image, a mental image in their mind, of their experience, which they can take to the text. And then the learners experience the text. You don't read it and study it. They don't listen to it and answer questions. They experience it.

And then they're invited to

not answer comprehension questions, not analyze the text, but give a personal response to it as we do in real life where you read something if it was interesting, I like that bit wary, he went up the mountain or, or that was pretty boring, wasn't him, and why did he bother telling us all those details so there's a an evaluative or creative or critical personal response. And then in this approach, what happens next is that is the learners are stimulated to produce a text of their own. It's a text which develops from the core text. And having done that, they then go back to the original text, and they help them make discoveries about particular language points, which could be grammatical could be pragmatic, it could be lexical. They they focus on how they writer or speaker, when I say text, it could be a spoken text, or an audio visual text. So that they focus on how the writer or speaker has used the language to achieve particular effects. And they make discoveries and they share their discoveries. And then for homework, I would ask them to look for further examples of that particular feature in use to confirm or disconfirm or extend their gender, their discoveries, their generalizations, and then the final stage is that they revise the text that they produced, which again, could be written or spoken, or it could be a video making use of the discoveries they've made.

Okay, yeah, well, or the sequence is very interesting. In a sense, use Thought from the meaning, and then engagement with the learner and the text. And then gradually, they deepen the interpretation. And then they look at the language. So the sequence seems to be echoing what we understand about the current second language acquisition theories.

And SLA terms, it's called from focused in a meaning focused approach. But it's the meaning that is dominant. That's what really drives it. But having experienced the meaning the learners are then curious to find out more about the language, and you're creating a need. So learners only learn what they want and need to learn. So this approach, yeah, he does follow SLA principles in I mentioned engagement, creating a need rich exposure, and opportunity to use though all the sequences are based on SLE principles, which the sequences in PPP approach aren't.

And I like the fact that the balance of implicit learning with some explicit attention involving cognitive elements through discovery work seems to echo is the the brain studies as well,

it does. And the key thing is discovery is not the materials or the teacher imposing a rule or generalization saying this is right, that's wrong. Excuse me, it's the learners discovering for themselves.

Sure. and discovering for themselves, that is the key term really, isn't it? Because after all, what's the point of learning, learning to learn about themselves and the world? And then feel better about it?

Yeah, there's a lot of talk about learner autonomy. But yeah, the main way to achieve learner autonomy is to equip them with the skills to discover things for themselves. Yeah, that's part that's why there's a research task, they go outside and look for English, and make discoveries themselves. So when the course is finished, you could argue the main objective of any course is to prepare the learner to learn after the course. So that when reading or listening after the course, they can not only experience it meaningfully, but make discoveries from it as well.

And to derive the whole learning, what matters is the motivation. They've got to some, they've got to be something in it for the learners to want to do it. And for each individual, if some text sparks off the motivation, then that's a very, very good start for learning, isn't it?

Yeah, certainly, I've had others say every student says, Well, I've had students who've asked me all this really interesting text, where is it from? Can Would you like to borrow the book is the book, do you have any more books by this guy? And they've gone on and on,

right? So you've been involved with in many international project material development project worked with the Minister of Education of various many, many countries. Now, tell us, give us an example of how you have actually used a text driven framework for actual cost books.

It's been used in many countries been used in China, Ethiopia, Singapore, all over the world. But I think my my favorite example is in Namibia, where the government wanted to replace and unpopular there, I say, British coursebook with a Namibian gospel, and I was the advisor on the project. And we gathered 30 teachers from all over the country in the capital of India. And in six days, we wrote a complete course book six days. Now, of course, I'm using a text driven approach. We divided the 30 into 10 teams. They were told, forget the curriculum. I had permission from the ministry to do this. Find an engaging text, we'd collected a library of comics, magazines, novels, poems, videos. And their task was find a text you think we'll engage 15 year old learners in Namibia, and that was the starting point. And then they followed this text driven framework. And each team had a monitoring team and they exchanged and by the end of the week, I had checked every night what they produced against the curriculum, which I put on my hotel wall. And we'd covered I think it was 990 2% match with the curriculum without checking

And then I said to the ministry,

ma'am, covered 8%? What should we do? And they said things, maybe the third conditional isn't that important, we can omit it. And that's important. Okay, we'll try and work that in. So I said, Well, can anyone work this structure into the unit without damaging its authenticity. And they did. And just just one other thing. One of those teachers was from Norway. And she was so impressed by this approach, she went back to Norway, became a publisher, Commission, the course book in Norway, using the text driven approach, which is called search, and that is my favorite course book of all time, the texts on the tasks are so engaged.

Well, I guess you mentioned the support from the government, and also the publisher, and then teachers as writers, that's really crucial, isn't it? Because if the coursework is given from above or away from the teacher, then they will complain that we don't understand the methodology. Whereas key teachers from all the different districts come together, then they have invest in vested interests,

that was the reason for having so many. And for coming from every region, they went back to their regions, and they felt proud of what they done. And they were the best ambassadors for the book shop.

And the teacher training is done in a way through the development of the materials, and the government being able to get involved and then willing to change the syllabus if necessary.

Yeah, that was the key thing we were we were privileged. And this is where the publisher can take that risk. I've tried to sell this idea to publishers to produce a global course book in this way. And they're too they're too afraid to frightened away, because what they produce will not look like a typical course book.

On the other hand, there have been other projects, where institutional level or the government level like Singapore or man, they are not satisfied with the global course books, which are censored, and then homogenized. So maybe you know, they

are it's happening all over the world. You know, I've mentioned the Namibia one I was involved in one in Turkey. Up been involved in the one you know, man, and in Singapore, we have to make some compromises, which we didn't have to and then Libya one, but at least Well, at least we think they are far more engaging and have great greater potential value.

So going back to the issues, or there are many more issues that even he would like to talk about. The

question of author, should tasks and texts be authentic? Should materials be censored? Or should you have provocative controversial issues? That the remaining such issues?

But I'm not sure we have time to talk about?

Yeah, I'm afraid. So. Where can people read about all these issues? Have you written about them?

Yeah, I've written a lot about these issues. So we've got some references. That the first reference, which is 2012. This is a review of materials development. And there's a substantial section on the issues we've talked been talking about, plus other issues. So that's the reference one 2012.

reference to the 2013.

This is a specific chapter on the text driven approach, which goes into much greater detail than we've been able to today and give us examples. The third reference there, which you know very well, because this is a book we've written together. There is a substantial chapter in that book on issues in materials development. Some of the ones we've been talking about plus others and this goes into detail.

I guess the third one is the complete guide. So you have produced so many books, what is distinctive about this, the complete guide,

they seem to think thing is he's trying to cover everything. So he covers all aspects, theory and practice wise combining the theory and practice of all aspects of materials development, and And that also includes many, many sections talking about exemplifying the text driven approach, okay?

And

the reference for

reference or reference for is an article which is coming out very soon, which looks at principle ways of using conventional coursebook activities. Okay, so you don't still use the course book, you don't have to rewrite them, but we make little changes, which open them up and provide more, more learning opportunities.

Realistically, teachers all over the world may be relieved to hear that Well,

I hope so.

Okay, so finally, I would like to ask

I'm sorry, I'm the final reference reference file. Okay. As we mentioned earlier, Master, oh, which I am founder and president of Andy Tomi a secretary, which is we've been running since 1993. We have a conference every year. And we tend to publish proceedings. The fifth one is a conference we had in here in Liverpool 2016 on one of the issues authenticity in materials development. And this is a publication edited by Alan Bailey and myself of the proceedings of that chapter. Sorry, the proceedings of that conference.

matchdays holding next conference in China, they just said

the next conference is in Shanghai in June, people can go to the master website, it's very simple, just a bit www master.org. That's where you get details of the conferences.

Lovely. Okay. So, as I was saying,

I'd like to ask you one further question.

What developments Would you like to see in the future? For example, digital materials didn't come up in our talk. So are there any exciting prospects?

Well, one development I'd like to see is much greater choice given to learners. choice of text, choice of task, choice of methodology choice of approach. And this can be done through digital materials. For example, you can have generic tasks, which the learners then find their own text for. You can have tasks where you have different versions of the same text, which are available on the web. I've been trying to sell this idea to publishers for a long time, but not much has happened. But I'm hoping that this this is this is the thing that digital materials can really offer easy ways of learners selecting from a menu and going to the web to find their own. I just and with one example. I should say also that these particular ideas I've outlined also in the second reference Thomas in 2013. One little example from a book I edited on blended learning. And I think blended learning is probably where the future of materials lies, where you combine face to face teaching, with teaching from the web. This was a course in Turkey for taxi drivers, who wanted to be able to converse in English with international passengers. And they met once a week, I think in the classroom face to face. But also, once they were in their taxi waiting for a passenger, they were able to rehearse what they were going to say to the passenger. And then there was possibility of recording the actual interaction with the passenger with the permission of the passenger. And this being monitored by the teacher and the teacher then providing follow up feedback and work for the taxi driver. So a very effective combination, I think of face to face teaching and the and the learner doing it for himself in the real world.

Anytime, anywhere. And the use of mobile in let's say in Africa is just amazing. So you know the with the mobile technology, the learning will change.

A great deal one,

we hope so but providing that they don't just reach Pete McShane filling in the blank multiple choice digitally.

It has to mean the use

of the opportunities and affordances which digital materials can offer.

After all, the brain is the one that learns and the brain needs to be

excited, engaged,

and inspired.

Let's end with the key word engagement. Yeah, that's okay.

Great. So at the end,

we we show the list of references.

No, no, no, no, he's already done.

Oh, he has. Okay.

Okay. We will certainly not use.

Okay, so, I hope

you enjoyed this interview. And I would like to end this video by thanking Professor Tomlinson. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai