Didactic Resources for Teaching English


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In dealing with this topic we should first define what didactic resources are, and then its role in the process of teaching-learning, as well as its specific functions in learning a L2 like English. Resources are any instruments that help us to achieve any goal; that is, auxiliar material with which the pupils develop the learning process. Therefore, the blackboard, computer and video are resources, but the crucial element is the word, which is a limited resource, because it is an intermediary between the reality and us. It provides a mental representation of the actual element of reality, but it is from senses that we first approach reality. In this way, the most complete learning derives from the contact with reality, which is an impossible thing to do in the teaching centre.

These resources bring this reality closer, and are also an aid to solve the problems of lack of discipline and attention in class. According to a study by Sanz Barrio et alii (Tecnología educativa, Zaragoza: Edelvives 1991), this is the percentage of data we retain in the learning process:

- 10% of readings
- 20% of what we listen
- 30% of what we see
- 50% of what we see and discuss
- 90% of what we say and do

The simplest didactic resources for TEFL are real objects, which can be used in several ways; we can write their names on them, use them as a source for vocabulary – improving pronunciation and spelling-, integrate them in certain structures, as locative prepositions, comparatives, etc. We can also practise the definitions through them and operate with them: the “total physical response”, which is a fundamental aid for the effortless internalisation of vocabulary. Any auxiliar material may also be used for activities such as role-plays, like fancy-dresses, in order to provide realism and fun.

People are also a basic resource; physical descriptions can be practised, and bringing new people to the class, like native speakers can increase the interest of the pupils. Telling own experiences are also a source of approaching to the other culture. Other common resource is, of course, the blackboard, which can be used as a TV program, writing down on it the date and current subject. It is important to planify what we are going to write before doing it, and to erase the remaining notes of the former class. Any drawing or writing must be done big and clear enough for everyone to see it, and ordered in a logical way.
Attracting the attention of the students is one of the most important tasks, and learning how to do easy drawings, can help us. For this reason, we should avoid writing on it for a long time; we can ask the pupils to participate by repeating what is being written, and it is very important not to talk “to the board”, but turn to the pupils to do so. We should also use the eraser instead of writing in small gaps –for the sake of clarity. Another hint is to use colour chalk to stress any element we want to focus on, like prepositions within a sentence, for instance. Writing the answers of the activities is helpful, since encourages the use of our visual memory –and then it can also be read more times, and finally the pupils can be asked to use it, introducing some differences.

The overhead projector has the same advantages of the blackboard, and some more, like the presentation of drawings or charts already prepared without losing time to do it in class. It is also useful that parts of books or notes can be reproduced, and a paper used to keep the focus or hide answers.

Flash cards can be extremely helpful if correctly used; word cards containing one single word can be ordered to build sentences and make transformations from affirmative to negative and interrogative. Groupwork can also be promoted with activities like a contest to write the longest sentence. In the other hand, with picture cards we can practise drills, by showing them in structures of the kind “he’s got a...”. If the cards represent famous characters, we can practise the physical descriptions, or play to guess whom the card represents. They can also be used to form a story, or to order them according to it. In the same way, wall charts are a useful visual input.

Slides, though not so popular are also good devices for their easy change and store. They are specially useful to show images of the other culture, the cities, typical features of Great Britain or USA or any other English speaking country, or even to show drawings to write about.

One of the most popular resources is the video, since it is a good motivating force, because it provides a closer approach to reality through the ear and eye and keep the students active. A presentation of the projection through a previous activity will connect the visualisation with a previous experience, and some exercises can be proposed to keep an active and comprehensive observation, like multiple choice question. The tape can represent communicative situations, like asking for addresses, where some cultural differences can also be perceived and explained.

Other controlled linguistic practises can be the repetition of drills, trying to predict what it is going to happen in the projection, dramatising or dubbing the
dialogues, or ways of using the indirect speech, making a summary of the plot or practising vocabulary or certain linguistic elements. These practises can also be applied when watching a theatre play in the L2, although it is usually quite difficult to find. Dramatisations involve the pupils directly, raise their self-stem and make them have a positive attitude to learning the L2. They are specially useful for developing oral communication and practising the four skills.

Computers are becoming increasingly popular for TEFL for its exclusive advantages: they allow a kind of interaction –with a program- and the process of learning is individualised, according to the abilities of the student. As it implies an active working, it improves the assimilation of contents and create an autonomous learning –the pupils learn to learn by themselves; also, the combination of the visual, sound and movement provides a very attractive presentation. Working with a computer may be similar to the textbook, but we can present the activity with a particular task, and test at the beginning and end, to check previous knowledge and learning.

Graduated reading books are also very suitable, since they provide an individual access to culture in general, and develop reading skills, as well as an autonomous learning and an interest on reading. The reading must be comprehensive, not oral, and selected according to the possible motivations of the pupils and the topic we want to deal with. The evaluation of the readings can be done by true/false or multiple choice questions, giving answers to make questions on them, completing mutilated texts, translating, relating drawings to the text, ordering different excerpts, summarising the plot, asking about vocabulary and for a personal opinion and evaluation.

Games are also an important context to practise the L2, since it presents real communicative situations, not mere simulations, and have certain advantages: they encourage team work and the practise of all skills, the use of language in a creative way, they develop the communicative competence and stimulate the learning of a L2. Nevertheless, the game must be integrated in the didactic unit, and the goals intended subjected to: the class room and the number of pupils, their previous knowledge and interest and the time and material available. Some interesting games, are plays on words, action games, table games and logical problems.

Finally, songs are one of the most successful resources, but must be selected carefully, according to the pupil’s interest, needing, level of difficulty and motivation. A presentation must be done before, dealing with the theme of the song, the group, etc. And, after it, some extension activities can be done, asking for relations between the
pupil and the content, their opinion, and their account of similar situations. Discussing the theme can be motivating, and some exercises about pronunciation and vocabulary can be done.