

Teachers and dictionaries in Australia: Is there a need to train the trainers?

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Abstract

It has long been the desire of dictionary makers that students should not only use dictionaries more, but receive training in their use. Teachers are the obvious providers of such training, but are they in a position to provide it? The following survey of teachers of English to nonnative speakers in Australian language schools and universities aimed to discover teachers' attitudes to and use of dictionaries in their English classes, particularly in relation to learners' dictionaries in the teaching of grammar, collocations and idioms. Although the majority of the teachers who responded to the survey used dictionaries themselves when preparing teaching material, only a few said that they provided dictionary training in class, and very few commented on specific uses that could be made of dictionaries. The findings reveal that, of those teachers who were interested enough in dictionaries to return the questionnaire, several had good dictionary skills themselves, and some had ideas for dictionary improvement. Most were sympathetic to dictionary use, but few had received training themselves in this area.

Many seemed still to be unaware of the potential advantages of an English learners' dictionary in the language classroom. The majority of teachers in this survey were thus not adequately equipped to provide comprehensive training in dictionary skills for their students.