Using and adapting the course book

Learning outcomes: at the end of the session you will

1. Know how to evaluate a coursebook.
2. Be familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of using a coursebook.
3. Be better equipped to make decisions about when and how to use, omit, replace, adapt or supplement the coursebook.
4. Be familiar with ways of adapting coursebook exercises.

Current coursebook use

- I plan my lessons responding to my learners' needs so I never use a coursebook.
- I always plan my lessons following the suggestions in the teacher's book.
- I use all the material in every unit in the order given in the book.
- I use a coursebook but I change most of it so that the learners do not get bored.
- I've got a coursebook but I haven't got time to adapt it.

Criteria for choosing a coursebook

- **Layout and design**
- **Instructions**
- **Methodology**
- **Syllabus type (grammatical, lexical, functional, situational, topic-based, task-based, multi-syllabus)**
- **Language study activities**
- **Language skills activities**
- **Topics**
- **Cultural acceptability**
- **Usability**
- **Teacher's guide**
- **Price and availability**

Evaluating coursebooks

Cunningsworth (1995) proposes four criteria:

- They should correspond to learners' needs. They should match the aims and objectives of the language program.
- They should reflect the uses that the learners will make of the language. Textbooks should be chosen that will equip the students to use language effectively for their own purposes.
- They should take account of students' needs as learners and should facilitate their learnign process, without dogmatically imposing a rigid method.
- They should have a clear role as support for learning. Like teachers, they mediate between the target language and the learner.

- Evaluation will depend on the evaluator.

- "The ability to evaluate a course book is important because it provides a baseline from which to make judgments about what to adapt and change." (Dalby)

Coursebook evaluation

Importance	Criteria	Penny Ur
	Objectives laid out in an introduction and implemented in the material	√ √
	Approach educationally and socially acceptable to target community	√
	Clear attractive layout with easy-to-read print	√ √
	Appropriate visual available	√
	Interesting topics and tasks	√ √
	Varied topics and tasks so as to provide for different learner interests and learning styles	√ √
	Clear instructions	√ √
	Systematic coverage of syllabus	√ √
	Content clearly organised and graded (sequenced by difficulty)	√ √
	Periodic review and test sections	√
	Plenty of authentic language	X
	Good pronunciation explanation and practice	√
	Good vocabulary explanation and practice	√ √
	Good grammar explanation and practice	√ √
	Fluency practice in all four skills	√ √
	Encourages development of learning strategies and autonomy	√
	Adequate guidance for the teacher, not too heavy preparation load	√
	Readily available locally	√ √
	Other resources like CDs, resource books, etc.	√

Advantages of a coursebook

- Offers security for students and teachers alike, clear goals and a framework for study.
- Brings a framework, organisation and structure to a course and the individual lessons.
- Offers satisfactory language control and a coherent syllabus, which is graded to a level suitable for the students.
- Often comes with other supplementary material and resources (e.g. CD, resource book).
- Provides students with a record of completed work and gives them the chance to revise.
- Gives the students the chance to look back at what has been covered and ahead to what is going to be covered, which makes it possibly for especially weak students to prepare in advance and gives students some control and autonomy over their learning.
- It normally provides a balanced mix of grammar, vocabulary and skills work.
- Although not all materials may be suitable for your class, it is considerably easier and less time consuming to supplement than to design a syllabus and create materials from scratch.
- It normally provides a balanced mix of grammar, vocabulary and skills work.
- It offers continuity and progression.
- Helps a school standardize instruction across the programme and ensure quality.
- The materials will have normally been tried and tested before publication.
- Offers teacher training, support and guidance for inexperienced teachers.
- Save teachers' planning time.
- The cheapest way of providing learning material for each learner.

Disadvantages of a coursebook

- Teachers often do not get to choose their own coursebook, and a coursebook may not match a teacher's teaching style.
- Quickly become outdated and lose validity (language, texts).
- Cannot possibly cover all the topics, communicative situations and tasks needed at a level by all students learning English around the world, but covers a common core of needs.
- May not reflect student needs, learning styles or interests – are designed for everyone and no one.
- Often does not provide sufficient recycling of language.
- The students may not like the book and might be reluctant to use it.
- Exclusive use of a course book can become very predictable and boring for the students.
- It can make teachers lazy, and stop them from being creative and searching for activities and materials which will motivate and interest their students. Thereby 'de-skilling' the teacher (Richards) and leading to student boredom (Ur).
- Often contain inauthentic / semi-authentic language.
- Course books dictate what is to be taught. This can stop teachers analyzing particular problems that their students may have and prevent the lessons from being student centered.
- May cover more material than the course has time for and therefore more than the students can process.
- 'methodological straightjacket that diminishes initiative and creativity' (Tice 1991)

Options for coursebook use

- Start at page 1 and keep going till the end
  - ➢ Will probably bore the students and the teacher
  - ➢ Is unlikely to answer students' needs
  - ➢ Teach the students – not the coursebook
- **Use** the coursebook lesson?

  No – **omit** or **replace**

  Yes – to **change** (adapt, add, reorganise) or not to change?
  - ➢ What are the needs and interests of the students? Course design and lesson planning should start with student needs – not the coursebook.
  - ➢ Can other materials do a better job?

When to do what?

- It's too difficult!
- It's too easy!
- It too fiddly or complicated!
- It's boring!
- It's irrelevant!
- The book doesn't meet my goals!
- It's too thin!
- I only have 1 student!
- It doesn't fit!

Examples of adaptation

Strategies	Problems	Solutions
Extending material	The task or exercise is too short, or the learners need more practice	Write extra items following the same pattern
Shortening material	The task or exercise is too long, or the learners don't need so much practice	Use as much as you need, don't feel you need to use everything, give different parts to different learners
Changing the level	The tasks or texts are too easy or too difficult	Make the material more challenging by adding more difficult tasks, make a text easier by breaking it up
Changing the form	It doesn't suit the learning styles of the learners, you want to change the pace, or the book often repeats the same sequence	Change the interaction pattern and the seating arrangement, or present material in a different formar, e.g. Cut up or on the walls / board
Reordering material	The activities in the book always follow the same sequence	Change the order

Adding to coursebook coverage

Does your coursebook cover the following satisfactory?
- ☐ Pronunciation practice
- ☐ Introduction of new vocabulary and practice
- ☐ Grammar explanations and practice
- ☐ Listening practice
- ☐ Listening and speaking communicative tasks
- ☐ Reading and writing communicative tasks
- ☐ Mixed-skills communicative tasks
- ☐ Short and long reading texts
- ☐ Review of previously covered material
- ☐ Some entertaining activities

Adding - Text

- Predict the text
- Speculate about the text
- Respond to the text (agree, disagree, sympathise, emotional reaction)
- Roleplay based on the text
- Dialogue-build based on the text
- Change the text
- Discuss and debate the text
- Reply to the text
- Interview someone from the text
- Research something related to the text
- Simplify the text
- Summarise the text
- Present the text
- Illustrate the text
- Describe the text
- Search the text
- Reconstruct the text
- Compare and contrast the text with another text
- Write your own text

Adding - Task

- **Survey** (see above); set a purpose - e.g. find out the person in the class who is the most careful/careless shopper…
- **Consensus**: students produce a ranked list - at first individually - and then in pairs/groups they negotiate a consensus. E.g. the five best department stores in their town, plus reasons.
- **Spot the lie**: similar to above: students individually prepare set of statements, opinions, experiences etc. and tell them to neighbour - idea is to spot the deliberate "lie"
- **Quiz**: students prepare quiz, and then test each other
- **Interview the teacher**: students prepare questions related to the topic to ask the teacher, and then write up the "interview" as a piece of journalism.
- **Show-and-tell**: students tell the class about their interest/hobby/object/favourite film - with a view, perhaps, to persuading other students to take it up, get one, see it etc.
- **Design-type tasks**: where students in pairs/groups design something, taking into account relevant factors, and then present it to the class. E.g. design a day's shopping in your town for the class, so that it takes account of everyone's needs, tastes, budgets etc.
- **Material-free role plays**: e.g. shopping for a school/package holiday/flat mate - half class are clients, other half are schools/agencies/owners etc. Each "service provider" is paired up and interviewed by a "client". They then move round one, until everyone has talked to everyone. Clients then decide which service they will choose; service providers decide which client they would prefer.
- **Non-directive listening**: Students are grouped in threes, taking turns as speaker, listener, and observer. The speaker tells the listener facts, experiences and/or opinions, related to topic. A time limit of three minutes is monitored by the observer. The listener - either during or after listening - "reflects back" what he/she understands the speaker has said and the speaker confirms/ disconfirms/clarifies etc as necessary. Afterwards, short (2 minute) discussion led by the observer on the process they have just engaged in - was it easy, difficult, fluid, comprehensible, accurate etc. The teacher can monitor discreetly.

Creating interest

- ❑ **Coursebook exercises are often closed-ended …**
  - …but open-ended activities are more interesting and stimulating. They can also invite a large number of right responses as well as encourage original, unusual responses.
- ❑ **Coursebook activities often consist of just filling in gaps and then checking the answers as a class …**
  - …but activities that have game-like elements and game-like constraints are often more motivating.
- ❑ **Coursebook exercises often use LOTS (= lower order thinking skills). Exercises such as gapfills, etc. …**
  - …but tasks that get learners to use HOTS (higher order thinking skills) are often more motivating. HOT activities get learners to think critically or creatively.
- ❑ **Coursebooks might sometimes be at the wrong level for your class …**
  - … so adapt in order to ensure that you provide the right level of challenge. Too easy and they will become bored and disruptive, too difficult and they will feel de-motivated, switch off and become disruptive.
- ❑ **Coursebook fomats and ways of presenting and practicing language can often be repetitive …**
  - … so adapt activities to break out of old routines and do tasks in a new way. Tasks should be selected carefully to be as interesting as possible and there should be a wide range of different ones over time.
- ❑ **Coursebooks quickly become outdated …**
  - … so look outside the coursebook for materials. The internet is an obvious source of authentic English, but also advertising, tourist information, menus, original version films, newspaper articles, etc.
- ❑ **Coursebook use can provide focus in a lesson but often involves people sitting still in chairs and looking into a book …**
  - … but having students looking down into a book a whole lesson and every lesson can get boring. Therefore, take activities out of the book
- ❑ **Coursebooks are often not considered very entertaining by students …**
  - … so provide entertainment. This produces enjoyment and motivation.
- ❑ **Coursebook texts can be rather long and heavy …**
  - … so adapt the activity and turn it into an information gap.
- ❑ **Coursebook material can be very general, appealing to everyone and no one …**
  - … so use the learners. They are more likely to be interested in tasks that have to do with themselves.

Replacement material

- ❑ 700 Classroom Activities
- ❑ Teacher resource books from different coursebooks
- ❑ Vocabulary Games and Activities
- ❑ Grammar games and activities
- ❑ Reward series
- ❑ Teacher's books from Cutting Edge, New English File, Face-to-Face
- ❑ Teacher-produced materials
- ❑ Student-produced materials

Quotes on coursebooks

- ❑ *"A coursebook should be related to critically: we should be aware of its good and bad points in order to make the most of the first and compensate for or neutralize the second." (Ur)*
- ❑ *"Coursebooks represent plans for teaching. They do not represent the process of teaching itself." (Dalby)*
- ❑ *"Coursebooks are proposals for action, not instructions for use." (Harmer 2001)*
- ❑ *" There is no such thing as a bad coursebook. Most of the time the books we use are well-designed and written in careful consideration of sound pedagogical research. However, difficulties arise when we try to use textbooks exactly as they are, without thinking about the needs, skills and circumstances of the particular set of students sitting in front of us." (Elliott 2010)*
- ❑ *"Materials, especially coursebooks, can come between me and my students, preventing me from directly experiencing and responding to the moment by moment energy and vitality of their own learning experience. If I'm not careful I reduce myself to a 'materials operator', separated from my learners by a screen of 'things to do'. (Underhill)*
- ❑ *"If, on the other hand, you take the view that language is an emergent phenomenon, and that the learning of it is a jointly constructed and socially motivated process, contingent on the concerns, interests, desires, and needs of the user, then the argument for coursebooks starts to look a bit thin. Moreover, if you take the view that the teacher's role in language learning is to scaffold these emergent processes, and that the teacher's authority derives from her ability to manage and facilitate the social processes out of which - and for which - language develops, then the coursebook looks positively redundant." (Thornbury and Meddings)*
- ❑ *"To be faithful to the spirit of Dogme, however, coursebooks should not be allowed to become the tail that wags the dog. They are the props, and not the screenplay, of the dogme "film". The idea is to use the coursebook, but sparingly, taking its grammar syllabus with a pinch of salt. It does not mean, however, propping up the book's weaknesses by bringing in yet more materials in the form of photocopied exercises, for example. At the same time, the idea is to include activities that provide optimal exposure, attention, output and feedback, thereby maximising the chance of language emergence." (Thornbury)*

Sources

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Task: choose a unit from a textbook you are currently using. Look at each activity and the unit as a whole.

- ▪ How would you arrange the activities?
- ▪ How many classes would they take to teach?
- ▪ Would you drop any of the activities?
- ▪ Are there any activities which need no alteration?
- ▪ Which activities would you change? How and why?
- ▪ How and with what material would you supplement?

4

Final words of advice

The choice of coursebook may be out of your hands ...

... but the use of the coursebook is in your hands

Therefore, Use it effectively!

Be aware of its disadvantages and limitations!

Don't be afraid to omit, replace, adapt, change, add or mutilate the book!

Don't let it limit your creativity and intiative!

You know your students

Meet their needs!

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