

A Candid Personalized Approach to Textbook Evaluation : Spotlight on English 2

Kamel Eddine Senouci BEREKSI

A Candid Personalized Approach to Textbook Evaluation Why Candid?

Because I am not going to use any sophisticated terminology, and I am going to be as practical and pragmatic as possible, even naive some might say.

In other words, it is not a so-called scientific approach that because any such approach exists in the field that concerns us.

Why Personalized?

I could also have said eclectic or composite approach. I just asked myself who might be concerned by a coursebook. And the list seemed to be endless; from parents, to politicians, to teachers, to students, to inspectors, to administrators, to bursars, to sociologists, to psychologists, to linguists, to didacticians (if I may coin this word), to textbook writers, and what have you.

Because after reading various evaluation grids or checklists and considering their salient features, I could not find one that actually suited my situation and included all of the features I thought were worth considering.

I drew on their most common features (eg form, content, approach, goals and objectives, content, gradation and sequencing, types of exercises, etc.), excluded what I thought was irrelevant to our local situation (eg equity and diversity issues, assessment), and added what in my thinking should be included (eg translation, culture, religion)

Why Textbook 2? Or is it the second coursebook?

The title of the manual on the outside cover is different from the one on the inside cover.

Because I am going to give a talk very soon Spotlight one to the EFL post grad bunch and I am afraid they might be here today.

The Instructional Package

In most countries, there is one syllabus, designed by some national authority and a number of textbooks for the teachers, or inspectors, or some educational authority to choose from.

The Instructional Package includes nowadays some or all (or even more) of the following:

The bare minimum:

The students' textbook

The standard:

The students' textbook

The students' workbook or practice book

The teachers' book

The audio cassette or CD

The video cassette

The Keybook

The tapescripts

The extra:

Transparencies

Pin-ups

Assessment material

More software

Selection of textbooks

Choosing a course textbook is a daunting prospect for those in charge of this responsibility.

The selection system of textbooks has varied through the ages.

Primary school teachers in France have been allowed to choose their own textbooks since 16 June 1880, and their secondary school counterparts a year later.

Even these days, it can fall within the four following procedures:

1. It can be selected by individual teachers for their own individual uses; which implies that you could and can actually find different books being in use for the same grade within the same institution (e.g. France)
2. It can be selected by Head teachers with their Headmasters for their school.
3. It can be selected by some religious authority for its community: Amish or Mormons, or catholic schools, and other private institutions.
4. It can be prescribed by some administrative or pedagogical authority for the whole country as is the case in Algeria: the prescribed textbook has gone through stages of analysis, evaluation and then 'homologation' and approval by the INRE, a specialized Commission of the Ministry of Education.

Is that a curse or a blessing?

What is going to happen in the near future I hope is have the INRE Commission approve a series of coursebooks and teachers will be left free to select the one they like best.

Teachers and textbooks

Although there is no clear-cut division between the categories, teachers fall broadly within the following range:

1. Book as a hindrance. "No textbook can meet my students' needs": these teachers believe wrongly or rightly that the syllabus is the students, and no textbook writer will ever be able to replace their own analyses or even hunches
2. Book as a servant. "The book is my starting point." It provides the initial framework and sequencing. It is a necessary and useful resource center for them to pick

and choose and adapt here and there what suits their own interests and their students' to enhance their effectiveness.

3. Book as a guide. "I can't do better than the experts, nor do I have the time." Linear approach: teachers who believe that they should trust the experience of the textbook writers, but at the same time, it is their job to add transitions and warm-ups as their personal print to make the book palatable
4. Book as master. "I am being paid to teach the book." The textbook worshippers who will go slavishly through the book, from cover to cover, doing all the activities of the book as they appear in the book. They will mould their students to the BOOK. What would these teachers say if a shoemaker adjusted their feet to the shoes?

Students and textbooks

Students look at the textbook in one or a combination of the following ways:

- The syllabus
- A window on the world
- A complement to what was seen in class
- A means to gauge their progress
- A lexical and grammatical reference
- A revision tool
- Or ... a « thing » to be used only in the presence of the teacher

The actual coursebook

What is its exact title?

The second English course book as is mentioned on the outside cover? or

Spotlight on English Book 2 as is mentioned on the inside cover? July 24th 2004 under number 668/DG/2004 as mentioned on the last page of the book? or

July 31st 2004 under number 772/DG/2004 as mentioned on the back cover? Format of the book

- 1. A clear annotated illustrated display of the different parts of a sequence (pp 4-6)
- 2. The five files (pp 7-116)
- 3. A short explicit grammar review (pp 117-123)
- 4. A two page summary of the book (pp 124-125)

Format of a file

- 1. Goals and objectives-
- 2. Sequences 1, 2 and 3 on same pattern
- 3. Listening scripts for all 3 sequences
- 4. Learn about culture Check Your project Self assessment

Format of a sequence

Objectives of the sequence

Listen and speak

Pronunciation and spelling

Practice Stress and intonation (... where's rhythm???)

Practise

Go forward

Discover the language

Practise

Reminder

Fun Excellent value for money

As far as I know it is available everywhere now

A good return for students and parents

A wideish cognitive range

A fair mix of verbal and non-verbal activities. A fair mix of receptive and productive tasks. A fair mix of reproductive and productive tasks

A fair mix of oral and graphic activities

A fair mix of integrative and discrete item activities

Oral/aural pre-eminence over the other skills

Conversational style having the lion's share

Stress mistakes

- excercise (page 16)
- advertising (page 105)
- organise (page 16)

Clumsiness

Page 33 Practise 3

Use a dictionary and do these word pyramids

Or

Page 33 Go forward How many words can you make out of the word 'stool'? Use a dictionary if necessary.

Which dictionary goes from the definition to the actual word?

Not user friendly

Page 45

Anagram of danger.

Page 100

Silly riddles.

"Ask your teacher if you don't know," say the textbook writers. What if the teachers don't know? Should they stop teaching?

Target audience

We know Algerian students are targeted because:

- Translate into Arabic, Tamazight or French
- People such as El Anka, Dib, Issiakhem, Souad Massi, Yacine
- Tag prices in DA (page 84)

- Weekend is Thursday (page 34 act.5)... *but no other reference* Cultural component
 - An endless flow of facts and figures
 - A refreshing Scottish touch
 - Wide and varied choice of cultural facts: theatre, cartoon, music, board games, language games, etc.
 - Use of authentic material to a very great extent- British humour
 - Local humour
 - Wide use of cartoons and strips
 - Universal culture (although 'Learn about culture' is supposed to be quote a window open on the culture of English speaking countries unquote page 5) *Alignment with testing*
1. Testing is more an administrative than a pedagogical feature in our current system.
 2. The more communicative a course book is, the more difficult it becomes to make testing congruent with teaching and learning.
 3. Most activities are formative (consolidate learning). Classroom formal testing is not.
 4. Difficult to score group work in projects.

Teaching about language

(page 108) "What is the difference between the past and the present perfect?" (page 46) "Label each file with its appropriate grammatical term (noun, adjective, pronoun, etc.)" (page 58) "What is the grammatical form of the word that is before the underlined word?" *Mistakes and misprints*

The second English Coursebook contains this non exhaustive list of the mistakes or misprints in the first pages of the book.

Page	Heading	Mistake	Correction	Type
5	Reminder	highlighted ,	highlighted,	Punct.
5	Reminder	remind you the	remind you OF the	Grammar
5	Discover the language	guide you discover	help you discover ; guide you through , in	Usage
8	Practise	78 kg.,	78 kg	Consistency
8	Practise	tall and slim girl	tall slim girl	Usage
9	Practise	Bold characters	Normal characters	
9	Go forward	No he hasn't.	No, he hasn't.	Punct.
10	Practise 3	The right column	The appropriate column	Confusing
11	Practise 6	you know. (Arabic, Tamazight or French)	you know. (Arabic, Tamazight or French).	Punct.
11	Riddles	What fruit do history.....		Key ?
12	Practise stress	Yes, I played the kid.	Yes, I played the kid.	Rhythm
15	Practise 3	The Cubism	Cubism	Usage
15	Reminder	carry ... carried	But play played.	Rule
15	Reminder	star starred	But open ... opened	Rule
16	Stress	exercise	exercise	Stress
16	Practise	Yes, she's playing the princess.	Yes, she's playing the princess.	Rhythm
17	Practise 4	Mona Lisa	The Mona Lisa	Usage
17	Go forward 1	... letter is about ?	... letter is about.	Punct.
18	Practise 1	The "Teenager's' Painting Prize"	The "Teenager's' Pair Prize"	Spacing
19	Practise 2	The "Famous People game".	The "Famous People Game"	Capital
19	Practise 4	In 1953, she got married and had 6 children		Clumsy
22	Check 6	use the right punctuation	Use the right punctuation and capitalization.	instruction
23	Check 10		Draw their attention to	instruction
23	Check 13	to have a part in a film	To have a part in a film.	Consistency
24	Check 15		Draw their attention to	Instruction
24	Check 19	a lost girl	A missing girl	Usage
24	Check 19	long curly black hair	black long curly hair	Usage
25	Project	Internet materials	Internet material.	Usage
25	Project	Sportsmen etc..	Sportsmen, etc.	Punct
25	Project	Works	Work? Achievements?	Usage
26	I know how	A stop at the end of each phrase		Consistency

26	I know how	... correctly..	correctly.	Misprint
26	I know how	To make the difference	To distinguish	Usage
26	I enjoyed	What page does it refer to?		
28	Stress and into	Can you give me the third of thirty?	Can you give me the of thirty?	Rhythm
28	Stress and into	Yes, I can. It's ten.	Yes, I can. It's ten.	Rhythm
28	Stress and into	Is this thing thin or thick?	Is this thing thin or thick?	Rhythm
29	Go forward 3	How do you call....?	What do you call ... ?	Usage
30	Practise 1	I Look ...	I. Look	Spacing
32	Listen and rep	younes	Younes ????	
32	Stress and into	Did you go early Sally?	Did you go early, Sally?	Rhythm
32	Stress and into	Yes, I went in a hurry Murray.	Yes, I went in a h Murray.	Rhythm
33	Practise 1	... give me the synonym of 'huge'?	... give me a synonym 'huge'?	Grammar
33	Practise 3	Use a dictionary	HOW?	Studyskill
33	Go forward	... synonyms etc...	... synonyms, etc.	Punct
33	Go forward	... example of word game	... example of a word game ...	Grammar
33	Go forward	Use a dictionary if necessary	Ask your teacher if necessary.	Degree of dif
34	Discover 1	Say what's the difference...	Say what the difference is ...	Usage
34	Practise 5	Tell him	Tell him or her	Sexism
35	Fun	The doctor said	The doctor said.	Punct
36	Stress & Into	I think I'll make a chocolate cake	I think I'll make a chocolate cake	Rhythm
37	Practise 1	Good cloze test but could be easier		Cloze
37	Role play	Caller speaks first	Called should speak first	Clumsiness
37	Go forward	Toys: dolls, games and books	Toys (dolls and games) and books	Punct
38	Practise 3	Draw the plan (Which one?)	Draw the map below ..	N u f
40	Sequence 1	B: a synonym of	B: A synonym of ...	Punct
40	Sequence 3	Princes or Prince as in 5 (p39)		Consistency

41	Practise	The wheels have different colours	The wheels are different colours????	
41	Crosswords	9 down no, I	No, I	Punct
41	Crosswords	14 across could be made easier	No, I drive slowly.	N u f
42	Read 3	Choose a game and explain its rules.		Too hard
43	Check 3	Why is 10 inside the square?		Consistency
45	Activity 14	palindromes		Too hard
46	Activity 17	Teaching about language		

N u f = not user friendly

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to leave you with a few thoughts:

Even if a coursebook is extremely sound pedagogically, if it difficult to follow, or insensitive to ESL students' experiences, its value is limited.

Individuals at all levels of a program, from policy makers and administrators to teachers and students, rely heavily on textbooks to achieve prescribed goals and objectives. Therefore, it is vital that all involved consider the importance of their decisions and strive to effectively match coursebooks with the identified needs of students.

Textbooks alone cannot provide students with all the knowledge they require, but they are a major tool in enabling learners to progress.

The more communicative a textbook is, the more difficult it becomes to align assessment, I mean formal assessment, with teaching and learning. Our form of assessment still favours reading and writing, which makes up less than 50% of the

students' learning time. Drastic changes have to take place in the official assessment system and in the attitudes of administration, teachers and students alike before our assessment can be made communicative and congruent with our teaching.

Suggestions!

- a teacher's book with keys, a glossary and an audio tape
- the list of lexical items used in the book
- pretest the activities before they are used in the book
- water down some of the activities
- ask your teacher?? What if he/she doesn't know?

Bibliography

- Allen, C.H.Jr. (1996). A critical assessment of textbooks for Middle Eastern History. *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 21(1), 22-25.
- Allwright, R.L. (1990). What do we want teaching materials for? In R. Rossner & R. Bolitho (Eds.), *Currents in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barnard, R., & Randall, M. (1995). Evaluating course materials: A contrastive study in text book trialling. *System*, 23(3), 337-346.
- Blair, K. (1995). Ideology, textbook production, and the expert reading of the popular culture. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 22(3), 179-186.
- Brosh, H. (1997). The sociocultural message of language textbooks: Arabic in an Israeli Setting. *Foreign Language Annals*, 30(3), 311-326.
- Chambers F 1997: "Seeking consensus in coursebook evaluation" *ELTJ* 51/1 29-35
- Cunningsworth A 1995: *Choosing your coursebook* London Heinemann
- Cunningworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and selecting ELT teaching material*. (ed.). London: Heinemann.
- Cunningworth, A. (1996). *Choosing your coursebook*. (ed.). Oxford: Heinemann.
- Daoud, A., & Celce-Murcia, M. (1979). Selecting and evaluating a textbook. In M. Celce-Murcia & L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. (pp. 302-307). Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publisher, Inc.

- Dudley Evans A & Bates M 1987: "The Evaluation of an ESP textbook" in Sheldon L (ed) *ELT Textbooks and materials: Problems in evaluation and development* ELT Docs 126 London: Modern English Publications
- Ellis R 1997: "The empirical evaluation of teaching materials" *ELTJ* 51/1: 36-42
- Evanciew, C.E.P., & Jones, K.H. (1996). Using readability, human interest, and writing style to evaluate technology education textbooks. *TechTrends*, 41(2), 37-38.
- Fiore, T.A., & Cook, R.A. (1994). Adopting textbooks and other instructional materials: Policies and practices that address diverse learners. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15(6), 337-347.
- Fragar, A.M., & Frager, M. (1993). Point-counterpoint: Value of school textbooks. *Reading Horizons*, 33(4), 300-312.
- Gunter, G., & Gunter, R. (1998). Tomorrow's textbooks today. *MultiMedia Schools*, 5(4), 18-22.
- Lester, J.H., & Cheek, E.H.Jr. (1997). The "real" experts address textbook issues. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 41(4), 282-291.
- Masuhara, H. (1998). What do teachers really want from coursebooks? In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheldon L 1988: "Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials" *ELTJ* 42/4: 237-246
- Skierso, A. (1991). Textbook selection and evaluation. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. (pp. 419-431). New York, NY: Newbury House.

Some Useful Websites

The websites below (and scores more) can be found with useful annotations at

- <http://www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/websites.htm>
- www.unison.org.uk/pfi/lg_course.pdf
- www.macmillan.hu/doc/test_teachers.doc
- www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/resources
- <http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/call>
- <http://educationforum.ipbhost.com>
- <http://www.english-4u.com>
- <http://www.epals.com>
- <http://www.freeaudioclips.com>
- <http://www.iatefl.org>
- <http://www.illustratedvocabulary.ip-providence.net>
- <http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/tutorial/languages>