

# Choosing a coursebook

## Introduction

Choosing a coursebook is one of the most important selections which teachers can make. Teachers cannot influence their working lives in many ways. You cannot choose your teaching hours, your holiday periods, the classes you teach, the learners who are in those classes, or the classrooms you use, but you can choose your coursebook.

You select a coursebook for your learners and for yourself, so you first need to analyse your learners' needs and your own needs.

### ***WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM A COURSEBOOK?***

Teachers want different things from their coursebooks and they use them in different ways. Some teachers want a coursebook to provide everything. They want the teacher's book to tell us what to do, in which sequence to do each activity and how to assess the progress which our learners have made.

However, some teachers do not want the coursebook to control their lives. They want to be able to plan their own lessons or even their own syllabus. They want the coursebook to be a library of materials from which they can choose to be used in the ways they choose.

### ***WHAT CAN A GOOD COURSEBOOK GIVE THE TEACHER?***

A good coursebook can help a teacher by providing:

- a clearly thought out programme which is appropriately sequenced and structured to include progressive revision;
- a wider range of materials than an individual teacher may be able to collect;
- security;
- economy of preparation time;
- a source of practical ideas;
- work that the learners can do on their own so that the teacher does not need to be centre stage all the time;
- a basis for homework if this is required;
- a basis for discussion and comparison with other teachers.

### ***WHAT DO YOUR LEARNERS NEED FROM A COURSEBOOK?***

Children want a coursebook to be colourful and interesting. They hope the coursebook will contain exciting games and activities. They hope the cassettes will contain exciting stories, amusing dialogues and entertaining songs and rhymes.

But what do the children need? We all know that children have short memories. They find it difficult to retain ideas and language from one lesson to the next. So the children need a coursebook which becomes an accessible and understandable record of their work.

A good coursebook gives the children:

- a sense of progress, progression and purpose;
- a sense of security;
- scope for independent and autonomous learning;
- a reference for checking and revising.

### ***THE PERFECT COURSEBOOK***

The Perfect Coursebook for every teacher and every class does not exist. When selecting a coursebook you always need to make a compromise.

There will be things which you don't like about any coursebook. How important are those things? Can you create materials to substitute those aspects? Has the coursebook got something missing? Can you find or create materials to fill that gap?

Remember that you work in partnership with your coursebook. Never expect the coursebook to do everything for you. You will always need to personalise your teaching with your own personality.

### ***WHAT CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE COURSEBOOK?***

As a teacher you have a collection of skills. There are some things which you may be very good at doing. Are you a great artist who can draw all the pictures you need? Are you a musician who can play and sing any songs you need? Do you know hundreds of simple games for your learners to play? Do you have a good competence in English? It may not be enough to be a native speaker, you also need to be able to analyse and grade the language which you teach your learners.

### **Checklist for choosing a coursebook**

Use the checklist below to grade each book you inspect. This will help you to judge all the books by the same criteria. It will also help you to see what you may need to add, substitute, adapt or ignore in the coursebook.

<b>What does the book offer the teacher?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Do the book's priorities match with your priorities?					
B. Does the book seem to do what it claims to do?					
C. Is it clear how to use the book?					
D. Is the book clearly sequenced and structured?					
E. Does it provide integrated revision of key items?					
F. Are there any useful, additional materials?					
G. Does it offer lots of practical ideas?					
H. How does the book develop a balance of all 4 skills? Does this meet your needs?					
I. Does it provide plenty of varied practice of any one set of language items?					
J. Does it help you to set tests?					
K. Does the book manage to avoid sexual, racial and cultural stereotypes?					
<b>What does the book offer the children?</b>					
L. Does the book look interesting and fun?					
M. Can the children easily see what they have to do?					
N. Does the book provide much for them to do independently?					
O. Does it give them activities and tasks which are interesting and worthwhile in themselves not just language exercises?					
P. Does it provide plenty for those children who cannot read and write with confidence?					
<b>Space for your own special questions:</b>					

### **Find out more:**

If you want to find out more about choosing and using a coursebook, read Chapter 4 of *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom* by Susan Halliwell [Longman 1992]