**CHOOSING AN EFL COURSE BOOK FOR BEGINNERS**

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

1. In Zürich we are free to choose the course book we prefer. The Educational Authortiy does not impose one particular course book upon us, as for example in Luzern.

**Question:** What is the **advantage / disadvantage** of this?

1. In Zürich, practice varies from school to school. In some schools, all the teachers of beginners classes decide on one book that everybody agrees to use. In other schools, each teacher chooses the course book that he/she prefers.

**Question:** What are the **advantages/disadvantages** of these two approaches?

1. We may even ask ourselves **WHY** use a course book **at all** with beginners.

Here are some suggestions.

Advantages from the teacher’s point of view :

i. It provides teachers, especially less experienced teachers, with material for their lessons so that they can really concentrate their time on perfecting **how**  they teach.

1. There are usually ample teachers' notes or a teachers' book which will help with planning lessons.

Points i. and ii. are especially important to help new teachers learn **how and what to teach.**

iii. There is often useful extra material, such as tapes, OHP transparencies, workbooks.

iv. Grammar is introduced logically and built up following a (more or less!) logical sequence.

v. Pictures and illustrations help motivate students and keep up their motivation.

vi. Teachers can plan ahead; they know what's coming and when.

vii. Teachers regularly provide practice in all four skills, simply by following the structure of the book.

viii. Teacher have help when preparing tests.

Advantages from the student’s point of view :

ix. There are grammar summaries/explanations and vocabulary lists to help structure the students' learning and their revision for tests

x. Pupils who miss lessons can catch up more easily.

xi. Illustrations and photos attract the students' interest.

xii. Students have a book and not a wad of loose papers that so easily get lost or mislaid.

xiii. Students who wish to work on their own can find extra exercises in the workbooks etc.

**What might be the disadvantages of using a course book**?

**Students** may grow tired of a book after a semester or two.

It is then good to get away from the book occasionally, bring in extra material, give out some Easy Readers.

Try to make this material relevant in some way to what you are doing (eg. more simple past tense practice, more vocabulary to do with travelling etc. etc. ... so that the students see it as something to be taken seriously, not as a time-filler !

**Teachers** may grow stale if they use the same book again and again. You need to have used a course book 2-3 times before you really know it inside out, know what to leave out, what to add and where. Try different approaches to introducing texts/structures. **Experiment!!!** After that, you could consider trying something else. This does not mean that you cannot come back to the well-proven book at some later stage . You may also consider using different books with different classes so as not to experience too much "déjà vu". Our students really do notice if we like a book or not, whether we enjoy using it or not !!!

Course books produced in England usually target multi-lingual classes and students staying in England. This means they include some material that is not relevant to our Swiss students. Don't worry about leaving things out or being selective with the material offered. Where vocabulary lists and grammar explanations are in English only, you will have to add extra sheets for your beginners.

Course books produced in Germany often target younger learners and so they may contain material that is perfectly good in itself but that may be boring/childish for our 15-16-year-olds. Until now, there has often been a gap between what the students want to discuss (ie. teenage concerns) and the tools available to them to do so (i.e. elementary knowledge)

Now that English is being introduced at lower levels in Switzerland, this will no longer be such a problem and will make the choice of course books available wider (and therefore our choice more difficult!).

**4. Some more points to consider:**

* **Outside influences** sometimes tie our hands as far as choice is concerned. The best course book is no good if we don't have **enough lessons** per week/**years of English** to use it properly. Likewise, the educational aims and requirements of a school may make a course book irrelevant or at least only minimally useful.
* Our learners used to be used to learning foreign languages. Many of them had already been learning Latin for two years before they started English; all of them had been learning French for two to three years. We used to be able to build on these good basics. As the situation is now, we cannot build on good language learning habits **and** have to cope with students learning several new languages at once! (at worst French, Latin, English ... not to mention the problems of foreign students for whom German is also a hurdle...)
* **Cyclical** course structure is by far the most popular in most course books. Important grammatical/lexical items and structures are introduced in a preliminary, sometimes quite rudimentary way. Later they are revised and elaborated. In a third "round" they are dealt with in an advanced way.
* This may seem unsystematic to linear thinkers. It does however, allow learners to say a lot in a lot of ways and quickly.
* In class, this system may be adapted as follows (PPP method:Present-Practise-Produce)
* Use a new structure yourself before drawing attention to it explicitly
* Draw attention to the use of the structure (present it, practise it, use it)
* Repeat the structure and expand its use at a third stage.
* **Systematic/linear** course structure deals with each item exhaustively before moving on to the next. This does mean a lot of time passes before students can express themselves in realistic situations. It does, however, appeal to the very organized and systematic student who likes to compartmentalize his learning.
* **Speed** is essential in the first year. While bearing in mind that, as mentioned above, our speed must be adapted to the needs and talents of our learners, it is also important to make the most of one the most attractive characteristics of English: The **early stages** are **easy**. Students can really achieve a lot in a relatively short time. Once they reach the intermediate stage, progress slows down slightly so students must have felt a sense of achievement and progress before this natural slowing down sets in.
* An additional consideration is that in G1 many schools only timetable 2 hours of English a week. Speed is almost impossible to achieve under such conditions!!!
* **Illustrations , drawing, photos**  all have their advantages and disadvantages. Drawings and illstrations may be less immediately attractive than photographic material but they also date less quickly. Photos looks embarrassingly odd once fashions /hairstyles have changed.

(Source: Hania Bociek)

