

Session Plan: The Coursebook as a Flexible Tool

by Costas Gabrielatos

c.gabrielatos@lancaster.ac.uk

Coursebooks have been variously regarded by teachers as the Bible, a guide, a crutch, a necessary evil, or a burden. The seminar presented coursebooks in their true dimension: a helpful tool that teachers can use flexibly, and combine with other resources.

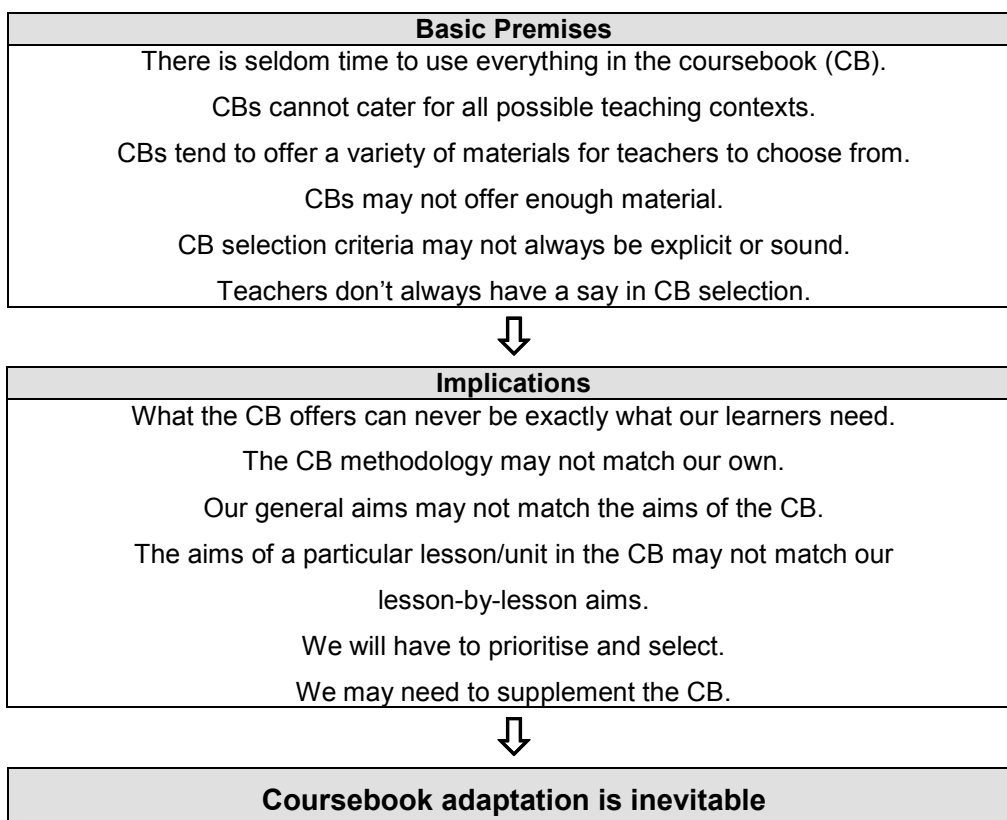
Coursebooks are not always clear regarding the methodology they use in terms of 'what' and 'how' to teach. There are also cases of inconsistency between stated and actual methodology. Finally, coursebooks cannot be relevant to all teaching/learning contexts (see Cunningham, 1995: 5-6; Dendrinos, 1992: 39-47). Similarly, supplementary materials (i.e. collections of tasks/activities for the teaching of specific areas, such as vocabulary or listening) usually give little or no information about their underlying methodology, or the place of the activities in a lesson. Consequently, teachers need to adapt published materials according to the needs of particular classes.

But appropriate adaptation requires teachers to recognise and be informed about the methodology used by the author(s), or to be able to identify the lack of clear methodology. What is more, teachers need to be conscious of their own methodological orientation, that is their theories and beliefs about the nature of language and teaching/learning (Woods, 1996: 190-212). Such awareness is important because teachers' actual practice may contradict their perceived methodological orientation (see Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Scrivener, 1996: 80). Therefore, the effectiveness of coursebook use is contingent on the level of the teachers' awareness and knowledge.

(from Gabrielatos, 2001/2002).

These are the handouts from a guest seminar I conducted at the TESOL Greece Special Event Issues in ELT: Persistent Problems, Practical Solutions, Hellenic American Union, Athens, Greece, 22 October 2000.

materials adaptation: option or necessity?



GENERAL GUIDELINES

what to check in a coursebook

<p>Identify CB actual methodology (which may differ from the stated one)</p> <p>Identify CB syllabus (topic? notional? functional? structural? combination?)</p> <p>Content and balance (grammar, lexis, pronunciation, skills, strategies)</p> <p>Identify CB organisation (starting point, integration, recycling)</p> <p>Identify lesson/unit aims (don't teach 'pages'!)</p>

what to check in a lesson / unit

Content and Balance	<p>Grammar</p> <p>Lexis</p> <p>Pronunciation</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>Integration</p> <p>Learning Strategies</p>
Aims	<p>Relevance</p> <p>Quantity</p> <p>Challenge</p>
Topics	<p>Relevance</p> <p>Interest</p>
Methodology	<p>Telling vs. Eliciting</p> <p>Input vs. Discovery</p> <p>Teaching vs. Testing</p> <p>Teacher vs. Learner centered</p> <p>Fluency vs. Accuracy</p> <p>Communication vs. Mechanical Practice</p>
Materials (i.e. texts, visuals, exercises, activities, tasks)	<p>Methodology</p> <p>Relevance</p> <p>Quantity</p> <p>Sequencing</p> <p>Grading</p>
Texts	<p>Relevance to aims</p> <p>Complexity</p> <p>Authenticity</p> <p>Length</p> <p>Interest</p>
Support	<p>Rules</p> <p>Explanations</p> <p>Guidelines</p>

adaptation alternatives

What can I adapt?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims • Topics • Texts • Visuals • Guidelines and Explanations • Exercises, Activities, Tasks • Games, Quizzes, Questionnaires
How can I adapt it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omit • Re-order • Replace • Change • Combine • Add
Where do I find alternative materials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same CB • Other ELT books • Publications (newspapers, magazines, encyclopedias, novels etc.) • Media (radio, TV) • Internet • Corpora • Own materials

why may I want to adapt?

Omit because ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners are clear about a language point. • Learners are competent in a skill. • There are too many tasks on a particular area/point. • The item/area concerned is not a priority. • The item/task is not well designed. • The item/task is not well-suited to its aim(s). • The topic is not appropriate for learners.
Re-order or combine to ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match your aims. • Use a practice task for lead-in and elicitation. • Revise an area earlier than the CB does. • Compare and contrast areas. • Provide thematic unity. • Provide an appropriate follow-up.
Replace because ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts are of inappropriate length. • Materials are inappropriate to the aim. • Materials are inappropriate to the learners' age/ experience. • Materials are unclear/ confusing / misleading. • Tasks are badly designed.
Add because ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas are not covered (sufficiently). • Texts/pictures/tasks are not provided. • Texts/pictures/tasks are fewer than needed. • Tasks are limited in scope. • Tasks are of limited range re. methodology.

what to check in materials with a lexical focus

Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single words and multi-word items • Denotation and connotation. • Register and genre • Collocation and colligation. • Affixation
Materials and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are learners given the meaning or are they guided to discover it? • Is there a clear context for presentation/discovery and practice? • How rich is the context? • Are learners given enough language data to discover/understand meaning and use? • Are lexical items grouped? Is the grouping meaningful and memorable? • Do exercises/activities teach or test? • Is there a balance between global and focused activities? • Is there a balance between free and controlled activities? • Are the activities realistic? • Are the activities personalised?

what to check in materials with a grammar focus

Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form • Meaning • Function • Use
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deductive vs. Inductive • Form → Meaning vs. Meaning → Form • Comprehension/Interpretation vs. Production
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context • Text vs. Examples • Amount • Authenticity • Clarity • Interest • Usefulness
Rules & Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terminology • Clarity • Accuracy • Generality • Amount of detail • Exceptions • Usefulness
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context • Amount • Focus (form, meaning, use) • Communication (purpose, audience) • Interest • Personalisation • Effectiveness

Sources

- Cunningham, A. 1995. *Choosing Your Coursebook*. Heinemann.
- Dendrinos, B. 1992. *The EFL Coursebook and Ideology*. N.C. Grivas Publications.
- Gabrielatos, C. 2001. 'Shopping at the ELT Supermarket: Principled decisions and practices.' *ELT News* 144 (February 2001). Revised version 2002 (March) *Developing Teachers*, http://www.developingteachers.com/articles_tchtraining/eltshop1_costas.htm.
- Karavas-Doukas, E. 1996. 'Using Attitude Scales to Investigate Teachers' Attitudes to the Communicative Approach.' *ELT Journal* 50/3.
- Roberts, J. 1998. *Language Teacher Education*. Arnold.
- Scrivener, J. 1996. 'ARC: A Descriptive Model for Classroom Work on Language.' In Willis, J. & Willis, D. (eds.) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Macmillan Heinemann.
- Woods, D. 1996. *Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.