Considerations for Evaluating Junior EFL Coursebooks: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract
This paper looks into the various aspects that need to be considered for the evaluation of EFL coursebooks for young learners in the early stages of their learning. An attempt will be made to establish certain issues that should be accounted for by the language teacher when opting for a suitable coursebook. At the same time, we will look at three recently published coursebooks available in the market, examining the way in which and the degree to which these criteria are met.

While trying to explore the type of activities that would be appropriate for young learners, we will discuss considerations, such as the particular cognitive characteristics and needs of these learners, the study skills that make them autonomous, and the development of their language awareness. In addition, we will look into the importance of interactive communication through problem-solving tasks and information-gap activities, group- and pair-work, games and songs. Reference will be made to the kind of activities incorporated in certain coursebooks and the way these coursebooks cater for the considerations set in order to provide guidance to the teacher who is faced with a plethora of materials available.

1. Introduction
While the rapid advance of technology gives access to a plethora of authentic material which the foreign language teacher could exploit quite easily for classroom use through the various information nets, and attention has shifted to the individual learner's needs, desires and interests, one could argue that the use of any kind of coursebook in the foreign language classroom would be inappropriate and rather obsolete. Nevertheless, pressure of time, and, in certain cases, lack of expertise knowledge on syllabus development on the part of teachers make the use of coursebooks a rather safe path to follow, provided they are carefully chosen from the abundance that exists in the market and used appropriately. It is the evaluation considerations of such a choice that we will try to explore considerations that will help the language teacher in opting for a suitable coursebook for his or her junior beginners. We have taken into consideration the situation in Greece where children are introduced to English as a foreign language usually at the age of eight or nine.
We would like to emphasise that the coursebook evaluation we have attempted is concerned with the degree to which these publications comply with the considerations that are paramount in the teaching of foreign languages to young learners.

2. The nature of coursebook assessment

Nowadays there is a plethora of teaching materials available and the teacher faces the dilemma of deciding which coursebook to choose to serve his or her teaching needs. When such a situation arises the teacher is normally guided by other teachers’ experience with a particular book or with public demand (Sheldon 1988). Claims made by the authors or the publisher of a particular coursebook are revealed at the first instance in the ‘blurb’, pointing out the age and level of learners the coursebook is intended for as well as the objectives and general approach adopted in the particular coursebook. However, these comments can only satisfy our initial contact with a certain coursebook. The other option is to attempt a micro-evaluation which would provide a more in-depth insight into the quality and applicability of the coursebook under evaluation. This micro-evaluation procedure can reveal the degree to which a particular coursebook satisfies the considerations taken for the adoption of a particular coursebook.

Some of the evaluative procedures that have been adopted so far are the use of checklists (e.g. Cunningworth 1995; Grant 1987; McDonough & Shaw 1993), scoring systems and reviews. Even though it may sound logical to consult such attempts to assess the practicality of materials, it can prove to be a daunting experience. Rarely does the teacher consult checklists, scoring systems or reviews due to the limited access to such resources. In addition, the checklists that are available tend to aim at the general language classroom with no specific reference to the necessary considerations for a particular group of learners. Even though checklists look sophisticated in their evaluative approach, using elaborate scoring systems, the results concerning a particular coursebook rarely reach the public who may be in search for a new coursebook.

"It is clear that coursebook assessment is fundamentally a subjective, rule-of-thumb activity, and no neat formula, grid, or system will ever provide a definitive yardstick" (Sheldon 1988: 245). Drawing up checklists and building up a scoring system is an arbitrary way of looking at coursebooks. On the other hand, McDonough and Shaw (1993: 53) support the idea that it could be practical to provide "some model for hard-pressed teachers/course planners that will be brief, practical to use and yet comprehensive in its coverage of criteria". Bearing in mind the limitations that arise from the use of checklists, questionnaires and reviews, the other option available is to take into account several considerations which are an integral part of language teaching and learning, accounting for the recipient party.

Books have certain features and avoid others. The balance of these features determines whether a book is good or bad for its purposes. When it
comes to evaluating coursebooks we realise that this is a complex process, because a number of pedagogical factors need to be taken into account: target group (personal characteristics), level, methodology, supporting material, and length. Chambers (1997) suggests that teachers use a consensus in coursebook evaluation to ease the process. When ideas are written down they are more easily accessed. Cooperation among teachers can bring to light desired features and permits possible alternatives to be weighed for relative importance.

Therefore, in particular reference to coursebooks for young learners we would have certain expectations that we would like to see fulfilled in the process upon the adoption of a particular coursebook.

3. Evaluating junior EFL coursebooks: what to consider

When focusing on the selection of a coursebook for young learners, teachers need to consider a number of issues which even though may sound self-evident are easily overlooked by the designers of the teaching materials. It is widely accepted that materials should be presented in a stimulating and vivid way to introduce the learners of English to another means of communication. By the age of 8 or 9, learners are already competent users of their first language and may fail to see a point in learning a foreign language due to lack of motivation. Thus certain parameters such as parental influence and teacher encouragement will play a decisive role in instilling in learners the drive to develop the ability to manipulate another linguistic system. In order to ease the decision-making process, a number of considerations should be taken into account: a) learner-related concerns, b) methodological concerns, c) teacher-related concerns and d) material-related concerns.

a) Learner-related concerns

When opting for a particular coursebook – i.e. the coursebook is viewed in association with any accompanying materials – the learners' age, their level, their interests and needs seem to play a decisive role. These important issues bear relevance to the methodological approach adopted by the authors of children's coursebooks. From this point, the term "materials" will be used to encompass the student's coursebook and its other components. It is evident that the age group and level that the materials aim at as revealed in the publisher's blurb are given top priority. The teacher who has knowledge of the teaching reality and the learners can sense whether the learners would appreciate a particular type of materials or reject other; in addition, the teacher who understands the strengths and weaknesses of his or her learners will know whether the materials reflect and suit their learning styles.

As young learners do not have any real linguistic needs to feel inclined to learn a foreign language, they could easily become demotivated and lose interest. Adults, for example, learn a foreign language to fulfil a certain goal: better job prospects, travel and so on. On the other hand, young learners do not share these goals and do not have similar functional
priorities, either. This entails that young learners have few immediate functional needs which should be sequenced accordingly in the teaching materials.

Young learners are desperate to impart information from adults; this actually gives them an incentive to find ways of expressing themselves and makes them quite resourceful, using verbal as well as non-verbal means. Materials should create opportunities for adequate controlled practice (e.g. learnt dialogues) and occasions in which learners can experiment with the language in a creative way are both fundamental in the teaching of young learners.

As young learners lack a real need to learn a foreign language, the burden to trigger their interest rests with the teacher who should foresee their interests and find stimulating and challenging ways of getting them involved. Assigning activities that have a game-like element (e.g. problem solving or information gap activities) prompt the learners to participate. However, learners' interests do not always reflect those of the teacher; what may seem as tedious for the teacher may be exciting for that particular age group. Acting out or singing and listening to stories seem to make learners enthusiastic with the learning experience. Language is seen just as another means of communication to be employed for a certain purpose. Cartoon characters are on top of their priorities as well.

In terms of topics, young learners could be motivated to talk about themselves, their family, their immediate environment, their friends, using the functions and language associated with them. As they grow older, the range of topics enlarges to reflect the kind of things that interest them (e.g. environmental issues, geographical location).

Children of this age exhibit developmental differences and the teaching practice should account for various stages that these children can be in. In other words, the analytical framework should encourage progress from the concrete to the abstract. As children develop conceptually, when children come to school they bring with them their experiences. Concepts present in their L1 can easily be transferred to the L2 classroom context. However, if for some reason certain concepts have not been grasped in the L1 setting, the understanding of such concepts in the L2 would be difficult if not impossible.

Certain materials attempt to make intercurricular links between the L2 and other school subjects, such as geography, mathematics and science. However, the adoption of such an approach should ensure that the concepts raised will have been introduced in their subject courses or that at least there is parallel development. Furthermore, borrowing insights from the L1 acquisition context, it is evident that children acquire structures and vocabulary items indirectly when the focus is on meaning rather than the language used. The normal progression of skills shows that listening is the first skill that children come to grips with only to be succeeded by speaking,
reading and writing. Needless to say that at some point there is integration of these skills as language does not appear in a vacuum. Nowadays, the natural process of learning seems to be the preferred path followed in the L2 context as well.

When considering the cognitive development of children we should account for the readiness factor, which plays a decisive role in the process of learning. Unless children are ready to take the next step, nobody else can make that happen. This explains the fact that learners do not always learn what teachers teach (Allwright 1984). At the same time, learners can only take in material that has been adequately graded and sequenced (i.e. in terms of density and order). Once learners have been carefully prepared to accept new concepts and some measure of control is taken over their own learning, their teacher can train them to make use of cognitive strategies (i.e. sorting, classifying, predicting, comparing), metacognitive strategies (i.e. self-assessment, self-correction, selecting activities), and social mediation strategies (i.e. development of social skills such as collaborative learning) which will essentially assist the learning process (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 1991; Sinclair & Ellis 1992). Due to the increased motivation and interest in language learning that 11- to 14-year-olds showed in a project on the promotion of learner awareness and responsibility, Ellis (1991) suggests that learning to learn might be introduced earlier (i.e. eight- to ten-year-olds) when learners are beginning to develop greater self-awareness.

Due to the young learners' inability to stay firmly in one place for a long period of time and their short concentration span, they should be involved in activities that demand some physical movement around the class. Total Physical Response (TPR) activities can simultaneously cater for their language as well as their physical needs through direct experience involving the five senses. The younger the children the greater the need to incorporate such activities in the syllabus. Furthermore, action songs, art, and games are likely to satisfy the need for active involvement and may lead to a memorable and indirect way of learning in which the focus is on the completion of the task rather than the accurate use of the language.

To sum up, the degree to which the following learner-related concerns are cater for in the case of the target group should be accounted for:

- the age of learners
- the level of learners
- whether the materials suit the learners' learning style
- whether the learners are familiar with this type of materials
- whether the materials suit the learners' interests and needs
- the cognitive level of the learners
- the learners' physical needs

b) Methodological concerns
The learner-related concerns have certain implications on the methodology employed in materials aiming for the young learner. When focusing on this particular age group, it is particularly important to create a meaningful context conducive to language learning. The aspects that need to be considered in terms of the methodology implemented are as follows:

- what type of approach (topic-based, story-based, functionally-based, structurally-based) is adopted
- what language is covered; grammatical structures, vocabulary, functions, topics, situations, intercurricular links, etc.
- how the four skills are promoted and practised; whether there is integration of the four skills
- whether the materials focus on the immediate environment and TPR activities
- whether and how the materials introduce songs, rhymes, chants, stories, games
- whether and how the materials make use of pair- and group-work (and project-work)
- whether and how the materials encourage involvement in role-playing and drama-based activities
- whether and how the materials use authentic language and promotes real language use
- how stimulating the tasks are (along with variety and length – information-gap activities, problem-solving)
- the extent to which learner training is employed in connection with the promotion of learning strategies in an attempt to cater for learner autonomy
- whether the materials are learner-centred
- whether the materials use recycling and revision techniques
- how evaluation/self-evaluation is attempted
- the extent to which the emphasis is on the use of the L2 versus the L1

c) Teacher-related concerns

Concerning the teacher-related concerns, we can isolate the following as those that matter to the teacher the most:

- the amount of teacher support (e.g. teacher's book and guidelines, cassettes, supplementary materials provided, flashcards)
- whether the materials suit the particular teaching situation
- whether the materials suit the teacher's teaching style
- whether the materials suit the teacher's interests

d) Material-related concerns

Before adopting a particular coursebook, the teacher has to look into some material-related concerns which are closely linked with the physical aspects of the materials. Some concerns relate to:
the layout of the materials; in other words, their appearance should be attractive for the young learners.
- the organisation of the units
- the quality of drawings
- the clarity of the aims set; in addition, the instructions should be clear for both the learners and the teacher.
- the adaptability and flexibility of the materials

4. From theory to practice: coursebook evaluation

Trying to bring all the above mentioned concerns into practice we looked at three coursebooks available in the Greek market today. We tried to see whether and to what extent these coursebooks meet our considerations. The educational context that we considered for the present paper is the Greek state primary teaching and learning situation in which English is introduced as a foreign language at the age of 9 (i.e. grade 4) or alternatively Greek learners are urged to start learning English at the age of 8 or 9 in private language schools.

a) Learner-related concerns

I-Spy 1

I-Spy 1 is intended for children learning English in primary schools, presenting language via lively fantasy features. It is designed to be enjoyable and lively to use; at the same time, it offers a sense of purpose as the children are creatively engaged in making things following instructions in English, while they develop classroom skills, such as the ability to cooperate, organise their own work and present it to their classmates. One of the aims is to engage learners in active involvement through TPR (Total Physical Response) activities and participation in listening games. Projects, which develop the cross-curricular idea, making use or extending their schematic knowledge, are bound to enhance motivation; this is why they are widely used.

BRAVO! A

BRAVO! A is researched and written especially for Greek children attending Junior A. Two themes run through BRAVO! A; one looks at a classroom situation which could resemble that of their own classroom context and the other is a story with lots of adventures of friendly characters.

Throughout BRAVO! A efforts are made to motivate the learners at regular intervals. There are frequent revision lessons after whose successful completion the learners can place a ‘BRAVO’ sticker on their page as a form of concrete reward. This is bound to give them a sense of achievement and encouragement. There are many instances, though, where authenticity is sacrificed for the sake of grammatical accuracy and the preservation of some fossilised procedures for the presentation of particular structures, results in loss of opportunities for motivation.
Fun Way 1

Fun Way 1 is intended for primary school children (i.e. starting English at grade 4) in the Greek educational context. Due to the significant amount of guided practice in Fun Way 1, the learners should feel comfortable and secure enough to participate in activities. However, the book misses opportunities to enhance motivation, through lack of personalisation, restricted number of games, lack of songs and rhymes, inadequate warm-up activities and use of the existing material.

Learners are given a variety of topics which appeal to varying interests and are children of the same age-group as the learners and this levels of ability. Language is presented through a series of stories where the main characters should help the learners identify with them. There are consolidation lessons which comprise episodes of a story with two aliens visiting Earth, a context familiar through science fiction films. A fairy-tale is included in the second part of the book, too, which children should find enjoyable. The idea of intercurricular topics is also used in the beginning of the second part of the book where the learners are set realistic, authenticated tasks with a focus on the outcome rather than the language used.

b) Methodological concerns

I-SPY 1

The primary target of I-SPY 1 is the development of listening and "to develop the social skills that pave the way for speaking" (Ashworth and Clark 1996: 12), while the development of reading and writing skills have a secondary role to play, as in the case of L1 acquisition. In this task-based course, the language structures and the vocabulary related to children's interests, such as animals, monsters and aliens, are presented in a cartoon context that young learners are familiar with and should find enjoyable. An attempt is made to expose learners to a graded sequence of communicative functions, which are linked to the language introduced and practised. A number of passwords are expected to be memorised and retained so that the learners will be in a position to utter the particular passwords at the start of the next lesson, in an attempt to include all English sounds and to present the most important sound-letter correspondences.

As stated in the teacher’s book of I-Spy 1, listening is systematically catered for right from the beginning and so is learners' training in learning how to listen. The authors encourage learners to make use of noises they hear to understand the meaning of words and situations, while attention is paid both to phonemic sounds and intonation and stress. Based on the active listening technique, TPR activities are integrated into the main syllabus. Learners are encouraged to provide a non-verbal response and, apart from the usual exercises of ticking, crossing and circling, there are listening mazes to enhance concentration and add a game-like element. The objectives of the sub-skills practised are listening for overall meaning and for specific information.
Paradoxically, despite the claim made in the teacher's book of *I-Spy I* that the emphasis is on listening to gradually offer opportunities to speak English, the first step to introduce learners to the use of the new language is via familiarising them with the letters of the alphabet! Role-plays and a significant number of flashcard games, which are based on memory and luck, involve learners in asking and answering questions and practising vocabulary. Pair-work is divided into three types: pair-work drilling, which should provide learners with a secure environment to practice the usage of the new structures, pair-work games where language is still under control but with some element of choice, and games, where success depends on imparting and understanding messages correctly. New lexis is introduced either through realia or flashcards and practised through pair-work, group-work and role-play. Songs, rhymes and chants, most of which are authentic material, help learners produce a long string of connected English.

*I-Spy I* makes use of a wide variety of tasks that are supposed to help learners in the early stages of reading and writing. Reading as a skill is practised in connection with the skills of speaking and writing. The writing tasks set are not very demanding. Learners are provided with a model and try to personalise the task. Quite correctly placing too strong an emphasis on writing skills would be inappropriate and might be demotivating. Familiarising the learners with the alphabet, the correct spelling of words and asking them to write a few things about themselves seems satisfactory. New vocabulary is practised through crosswords and model writing.

Perhaps the most impressive and welcome change in *I-Spy I* is the systematic effort it makes not only to develop learning strategies but also to make learners responsible for their own learning. The learner is encouraged to focus on the strategies he or she employed to fulfil a task and evaluate his or her own learning through self-evaluation lists. This is a step to the right direction, which the teacher can exploit to any degree he or she wishes, discussing and evaluating successful strategies. The only objection to be raised here is that the teacher is sometimes advised to conduct these discussions when the opportunity arises, interrupting the flow of the lesson switching from the target language to the mother-tongue and then back to the target language again. We feel that these awareness activities might be kept separate. In addition to the self-evaluation checklists in the Activity Book, there are four tests provided to accompany *I-Spy I*; each test comprises one page of listening and one page of reading and writing. It is recommended that the learners be evaluated in terms of speaking skills as well.

**BRAVO! A**

**BRAVO! A** states that it was "researched and written especially for Greek children". However, one cannot fail to notice after such a remark, that the book has tried to conform to the wishes of a significant part of Greek language teachers who support a more structural approach to foreign
language teaching. The author states that the book "follows a structural/functional syllabus". The number of structures presented and practised throughout the 65 lessons of the course impose great retention demands on the learners who may not be in a position to absorb all the input provided. To be more specific, one cannot fail to notice that the book presents a significant quantity of structures, introducing the use of articles, the plural form, pronouns, and so on, as well as the Present Simple, the Present Continuous and the "going to" form of future. All this input would probably be too much for young learners to digest in their first year of foreign language learning.

In BRAVO! A, there is no strong emphasis on listening skills and practice is restrained to the listening of texts, followed by choral and individual repetition. No systematic listening tasks that would develop listening skills are set, either. Songs are included, but in a rather small number, and so are rhymes which would help children recall the vocabulary and structures contained. Nevertheless, both the songs and the rhymes have been devised, as stated in the teacher's book.

BRAVO! A offers practice of speaking skills; this is mostly achieved through exercises of repetition and grammar usage. Many of the oral pair-activities set to the learners lack motivation and reason for communication missing opportunities for personalisation and fun. There is, however, a limited number of activities and games included in the book offering good practice and involving the learners in the learning process, since they demand their active participation, focusing their attention on the message rather than on the language to be used in the process. Despite the claim that pronunciation "is given a special focus", this is restricted to the pronunciation of individual sounds and words. The teacher is not given any practical tips on how to deal with particular phonetic "problem-areas" of Greek learners.

Reading and writing are emphasised heavily throughout BRAVO! A. The instruction to ask the learners to "say and spell" is more than over-repeated showing an anxiety for the learners to come to grasp with the written form of the language. Reading is practised through the dialogues which gradually become longer. Reading comprehension or true/false statements exercise and develop the learners' ability to read for specific information. The matching of halves of sentences develops the ability of learners to identify coherent sentences but text cohesion is not considered. The exercises presented in the Workbook place strong spelling demands on the learners. Nevertheless, there are also activities which promote the exchange of personal information among them through the completion of tables and questionnaires and then writing a report, activities which are motivating since they involve an information gap that learners have to bridge and personalise the tasks.
**BRAVO!** A offers no training in different approaches to language learning, either towards promoting their autonomy or towards their assuming some responsibility for their learning. The learners are not aided into assessing the paths they followed for the completion of tasks that could lead to the awareness of their preferences and perhaps help them form correct learning habits. In addition to this, **BRAVO!** A offers no help for the learners' arrangement of their "mental" lexicon, either. However, there are revision lessons or revision tests, which are seen as one way of assessing the learners' grammatical knowledge.

**Fun Way I**

*Fun Way I*, currently used in state primary schools and distributed free of charge, is written by a group of Greek teachers of English. Since the main characters of *Fun Way I* are children, the voices heard on the cassettes are those of native children. This is the only authentic material the learners have access to: the sound and rhythm of those children's speech. However, the voices of the children are not always heard clearly. One of the major drawbacks of the book, acknowledged by its authors, is the lack of songs and rhymes. As mentioned in the teacher's book, these are to be added at a later time. However, up to this day no amendments have been made.

One of the targets set is the development of good pronunciation habits and, since the book is intended solely for the use of Greek learners, we would expect to see special attention being given to particular phonetic problems Greek learners face. Surprisingly enough, this is nowhere to be seen nor are there any instructions for the teachers how to deal with them. The learners are expected to listen for gist and specific information. Yet, the former is not fully exploited if the instructions in the teacher's book are to be followed. The learners are asked to make guesses in Greek and listen to verify their guesses while keeping their books open. It is worth mentioning that no post-listening tasks are set. Therefore, if a teacher is to follow these instructions, s/he is to lose a great opportunity to train learners how to listen for gist, for specific information and how to make inferences.

Despite the claim that the aim of *Fun Way I* is to help learners communicate in English from the start, the activities are mainly activities of usage, since most refer to the practice and not the production stage. The book misses several opportunities to personalise the language presented and to make it more appealing for the learners.

It is worthwhile noticing that *Fun Way I* puts emphasis on the development of the skills of reading and writing right from the beginning and on many occasions new structures are introduced first in the written form and then learners are given the opportunity to practise them orally. The skill of reading is carefully developed starting from the recognition of the letters of the alphabet and then the reading of dialogues through repetition of utterances and reading aloud. Dialogues are introduced to offer practice in reading and gradually become longer. It should be stressed, though, that
there are no pre- or post-reading activities to develop reading sub-skills such as reading for gist or for details, or cohesion and coherence.

Care has also been taken so that the meaning of new vocabulary items can be inferred from the pictures. However, the arrangement of the learners’ ‘mental’ lexicon is not particularly aided, as the teacher is advised to treat certain superordinates, such as the word ‘family’ and the word ‘fruit’ as passive vocabulary without trying to create a web among lexical items. As *Fun Way I* consists of part A and B, such associations are introduced in the second part of the book.

Writing is significantly practised and follows the pace of the demands made on reading. The whole workbook is devoted to the skill of writing. The learners receive practice through exercises of usage and are gradually led to writing short paragraphs. Sentence cohesion is practised through sentences of mixed words but text cohesion is not considered.

Even though review of the literature suggests that there should be systematic learner training provided, *Fun Way I* does not offer opportunities to train learners how to use sub-skills, nor are learners encouraged to use learning strategies (i.e. cognitive and metacognitive strategies as expressed by Brewster, Ellis & Girard 1991) while working on various activities. Learners are not guided towards assuming responsibility for their own learning or trained how to assess their progress. However, the authors do encourage some amount of project work in the beginning of the second part of the book, which should develop learners’ classroom skills such as the skill of cooperation.

c) Teacher-related concerns

*I-Spy I*

The amount of support material provided by *I-Spy I* – consisting of a teacher’s pack including a teacher’s book, a photocopy master’s book, a poster pack, a flashcard pack and three cassettes – is quite impressive. The teacher’s book contains detailed instructions, including even the language a teacher can use while introducing the activities. This may be thought of as restrictive by the experienced teacher but it can prove invaluable to the inexperienced one. A point worth mentioning, though, is that a lot of the learners’ guessing in the warm-up phase takes place in Greek therefore missing opportunities for comprehensible input. The photocopiable material provided, along with the poster and the flashcard pack, offer a ready-made bank of resources. Furthermore, the four tests provided aid the teacher to evaluate the progress of the learners and spot any difficulties so that remedial teaching can take place. It is worth noting that the wealth of support material and the teaching ideas provided offer flexibility to the teaching situation, which could be adapted according to individual needs.

*BRAVO!* *A*

*BRAVO!* *A* consists of the main coursebook, a workbook, a teacher’s book and two cassettes. The set of tests that the teacher’s book contains offers
help for the evaluation of the learners' performance. Faithful to the approach of the book, the tests check mostly the learners' ability to manipulate structures and vocabulary taught and allow a small part for the evaluation of the learners' aural development. The teacher's book, on the other hand, contains instructions that would not be pedagogically adequate for the language teacher, but do comply with the approach the author adopts concerning language teaching. As mentioned earlier under the heading of the methodological concerns, it seems that the materials do not account for the needs of Greek learners who are considered to be the focal point of this book.

Fun Way I
The components of Fun Way I are: coursebook, workbook, teacher's book and two cassettes. The only assistance provided to the teacher is through the teacher's book and the cassettes. The authors claim that "it [the teacher's book] may prove particularly helpful to those who have not had the opportunity to teach English to learners of this specific age-group". However, instructions of the type "present the unknown words" or "deal with the unknown vocabulary" cannot be seriously considered as helpful and instructions of the type "in Greek explain what the title means" or "ask students to look at the pictures and try to identify the situation in Greek", because opportunities for comprehensible input will be missed. There are no systematic revision tests or exercises, either, that could help the learners' or the teacher's assessment of progress for remedial work to take place.

d) Material-related concerns
I-Spy I
I-Spy I is a nicely illustrated coursebook which should be attractive for the young learners. As I-Spy I consists of eight units plus a short introductory unit, 'Introduction to English' and each unit contains six lessons, it is expected that it provides a total of 50 teaching lessons. Each unit follows a regular pattern of development, so that both the teacher and the learners easily access it. The teacher can make use of the plethora of the accompanying materials, depending on the time available. This last point renders I-Spy I a rather flexible coursebook to use in any classroom context and the teacher can adapt to his or her own teaching situation.

BRAVO! A
It is colourful and lively illustrated which should make it appealing to children and the structures are presented through two themes, both of which are familiar to young learners: that of the classroom environment and a story with animals. There is continuous consolidation and recycling of the structures presented. The PPP model is adopted -presentation, practice, production. Nevertheless, there were points where we failed to perceive the production stage. Even though language structures are presented in a graded way, the great number of structures presented may be problematic for junior beginners. The structural orientation of the coursebook would not satisfy
the teacher who wants long term effects on the learners who in turn will be unable to follow and absorb all the structural points raised in every lesson as the practice undertaken is not satisfactory. A resourceful teacher would have to find ways of giving another dimension to the teaching process by making up more challenging activities.

Fun Way 1

In comparison to all other coursebooks available in the market, it has a rather poor quality of paper and illustrations. Throughout the book, there is a regular format which takes the form of each unit being divided into four lessons each with the exception of unit 5 which is a revision unit of the material taught in units 1-4. Fun Way 1 is densely written if the material is expected to be taught during one academic year. The teacher would have to be selective and have certain priorities over the order in which the materials will be covered, finding ways to supplement his or her teaching practice.

e) Overall assessment

I-Spy 1 offers a refreshing outlook on junior language books; it is motivating, carefully graded, fun for children to work with, follows the natural order of acquisition of skills in a balanced and integrated way, and trains learners in the awareness of learning strategies helping them to become autonomous and responsible. It responds to most of our considerations.

As an overall assessment, we could say that BRAVO! A does not successfully respond to our considerations for children's first year language books but would satisfy those teachers who still prefer a structural syllabus with reference to the functional value of the structures presented.

The authors of Fun Way 1 have missed the opportunity to create pedagogically sound material despite the fact that the book is on the right track. The use of familiar context, the regular consolidation and recycling activities, in connection with the introduction of intercurricular topics offer a promising learning experience; however, the density of the language presented and the material to be covered, the lack of learner training, the absence of proper teacher support and the limited amount of realistic and personalised tasks for the development of the oral skills are some of the weak points of this particular coursebook. Improvements on this coursebook are expected in the near future.

5. Conclusion

A substantial body of the literature outlines the importance of using checklists and various evaluation procedures in order to undertake coursebook evaluation. However, it seems that it would be preferable to take into consideration learner-related concerns which are inextricably bound with the methodology implemented. Some teacher-related and material-related concerns may affect the judgement upon a particular coursebook. Despite the claims made by coursebook designers that they focus on the young learner, it seems that certain considerations are
sometimes overlooked, rendering language learning a demotivating experience. Being aware of the characteristics of this particularly sensitive age group and the implications that these characteristics bear on language teaching can help the teacher gain essential opportunities for making the learners willing recipients of knowledge.

References


