

Assessing Young Learner's English Materials

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Received: 1 April 2004 / Version accepted: 8 September 2004

ABSTRACT: Nowadays all educational authorities in Europe are making an effort to teach foreign languages starting at very early ages. Teachers of English at nursery and pre-school levels used to produce their own materials, although in the last few years we have seen a flourishing amount of teaching methods and materials for young learners issued by every well-known publishing house.

With this panorama in mind, the difficulty of the teacher's task has changed from one side to the other, as some times it is not easy to decide which books children should or shouldn't buy. Taking this need into consideration, in this paper we intend to study all the elements involved in the assessment of course books and supplementary materials for young learners and provide examples of evaluation templates.

The analysis includes the physical format of coursebooks, the components of the methods the authors, their adequacy in terms of Ministry of Education requirements, and then, the contents taught with the underlying pedagogy.

There are other elements such as audiovisual aids and educational software, also taken into consideration.

Key words: assessment, English Materials, Young Learners

RESUMEN: En la actualidad todas las autoridades educativas europeas están realizando un gran esfuerzo para fomentar el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en edades tempranas. Los profesores de inglés en educación infantil solían usar en sus clases materiales de elaboración propia, aunque en los últimos años hemos presenciado un florecimiento de métodos y materiales destinados a este grupo de jóvenes aprendices, publicados por todas las editoriales de prestigio en EFL.

Situados en este nuevo escenario, el profesorado se ha tenido que enfrentar con una nueva tarea, la de elegir los libros que las editoriales ponen a su alcance.

En este artículo intentamos analizar todos los elementos que intervienen en la evaluación de libros de texto y materiales complementarios para niños de Educación Infantil y Primaria y proporcionar ejemplos de plantillas de evaluación.

El análisis incluye el formato físico de los libros de texto y los componentes de los métodos, autores, su adecuación en función de los requerimientos del Ministerio de Educación y, además, los contenidos enseñados y la metodología empleada.

Hay otros elementos como ayudas audiovisuales y software educativo que también se tienen en cuenta.

Palabras clave: evaluación, materiales de inglés, inglés para niños

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years politicians have taken measures to improve the level of foreign language education at preschool ages in this country, following the European recommendations. This has produced a high need for appropriate language teaching materials and many teachers were forced to improvise by using their own materials. Publishing houses have reacted quickly by releasing a large number of books targeting this age group which has made it overwhelming for teachers to choose which material is more adequate to meet their needs.

It is therefore necessary to have enough criteria to analyse the different components of each course in order to meet in the staff room and discuss which is the best one for both teachers and students of English at pre-school levels.

As all teaching methods consist on course books and supplementary material, the analysis has to take into account all these elements.

2. COURSEBOOKS

When we meet someone, we immediately have a first impression, which often determines our opinion about this person. The same thing happens with course books. When we find several books on the table, we tend to quickly browse through them all more carefully examining the one which is the most attractive in our opinion. Therefore, the **physical format** of the book is the very first aspect teachers analyse unconsciously.

The cover has to be attractive and suitable for young learners (Varela, 2003). Illustrations should be used instead of photographs, in basic and bright colours. Animals are children's favourite characters, therefore most books have an animal (dog, tiger, bear, rabbit, elephant) that is the main character of the book and which is portrayed on the cover. The character on the cover should be represented in stories throughout the coursebooks. Most text books include a puppet of this same character to use along with the book.

The title of the book, the level, the authors, and the school year in which the book should be used have to be clearly written on the cover as well. In the back, a list of all the elements of the course along with their description has to appear.

Size does matter. The best would be to use large but thin books in horizontal lay-out following the tendency of worksheets used in the rest of the school subjects. The worksheets should have big enough margins to let the students draw, colour or write on the page. The type of paper has to be heavy enough and not too shiny, as otherwise it is impossible to write or draw on and you can see through the pages. As young children tend to draw or cut or punch the whole book whenever they can, it is important for both teachers and parents that each page is detachable and easy to store in a file thanks to the holes which perforate all the worksheets from the book. Some publishing houses increase profits on a page by printing two different units on both sides. However, it is much better to have just one and nothing at the back except for the written instructions both in English and Spanish, for the parents in case they do not speak English and have to help their children at home. In fact, the cooperation among teachers and parents is very important for developing children's self-esteem in those years (Rodríguez, 2004).

The number of units and their organization is very important. The common problem in pre-school education is the variety of circumstances which occur at the different schools. Some have 45 minutes a day once or twice a week, while others spend the half afternoon every day teaching English. In between we find all kinds of other options. That means the main topics taught should correspond to the general contents taught in each term. Nowadays most of the books below 1° year of Primary Education (*Cool English*, Cambridge University Press) have less than 80 pages. The number of units varies from 8 to 12.

The page **lay-out** has to be attractive and clear. The younger the children are the more they like drawings. They have to be clear and attractive, using basic colours such as red, yellow, blue and green, and avoiding unnecessary purple, brown, and grey, which make illustrations look older and more serious. All the pictures in the book have to be clear enough to give a context to the contents or activities. Sometimes illustrations do not help and are misleading, as they are too sophisticated or too simple to be well understood, the colours are wrongly printed (a brownish orange, or a greenish apple). Illustrations for young children have to show the basic elements and cannot add excessive details. There is a debate concerning illustration styles. Teachers are used to Walt Disney like characters, while children born in the late 90s and after the year 2000 are used to different aesthetic tastes. Sometimes what the teachers who choose the books consider to be "nice" has nothing to do with the *young children's opinion*. *The latter start watching TV cartoons such as The Simpson or The Tweenies*, where "deformed" creatures are the norm.

Although we all agree that teaching English to young learners is basically an oral process (Mur, 1998), the new educational curriculum advised that some letters and numbers had to be introduced in pre-school level foreign language teaching. As the government has changed, we still do not know if this will be put into practice. Anyway, if numbers and letters must be introduced, the type and font used has to be considered, as well as the number of words per page and the situation of the lines for the writing and copying activities. The first words have to be copied just below the model provided, never at the sides.

Apart from the format, teachers have to take into account the number and quality of the **components of the method**. A language course aimed at young children has to be quite varied and include enough supplementary materials to make the teacher's life easier and the children's school time enjoyable. On the one hand, we do mean that the more elements we can use in the class the better. On the other hand, these elements do not have to be strictly necessary, but just complementary as many teachers do not have the time to use them, or the school does not have the financial resources to purchase them.

A good English course for this age group has to include the following materials:

- Pupil's book, which can be at the same time workbook (or activity book).
- Teacher's book. Bilingual if possible (in case teachers prefer to read in their mother tongue), with the key to the exercises, teaching tips, syllabus, transcription of the audio CD, extra activities, photocopyable cut-outs, games, etc.
- Puppet.
- Audio CD/Cassette for both teachers and students with songs, stories, dialogues, rhymes, chants. CDs are better for the classroom, as they can be easily stored, are more durable, plus the teacher saves time to find a certain sound track.
- Flashcards to help introduce or review the course vocabulary.

- Posters which help review every term, for example, all the vocabulary studied.
- Picture dictionary with illustrations of all the words studied in context.

If possible, the following materials are also very useful:

- Teacher’s resource pack with transparencies, cut-outs, photocopiable activities, extra songs, little animals, fruits, etc, in plastic, large pictures of the family, clothes, house, furniture, etc.
- Big book of stories for the classroom with a CD or cassette.
- Video or DVD to contextualise the contents of the books, provide some cultural information and tell stories.
- Interactive CD that provides extra practice for students at home or at the study centre. It has to be very attractive, easy to use (only with the mouse or a tactile screen) and provide a lot of positive feedback.

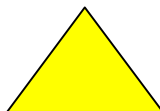
Teachers often forget that the **authors** (Byrd, 2000) who write the book are the key of the content and pedagogy quality provided. Sometimes Spanish teachers are very snobbish and prefer to see English or “foreign names” on the covers of the books, but they do not realize that native speakers do not necessarily possess the right qualification for teaching or writing learning materials. Some of them, “just” speak English, yet others are very well qualified in all aspects. Of course having a British or North American author among the group or authors is a necessary requirement for the quality of the language taught, but he or she should also master the language and the way Spanish students are taught and learn. Native or not, it is also important to have a person within the team of writers who has enough teaching experience in the level he or she is writing about. Apart from the expert local teacher and the native speaker, a university lecturer or professor of Applied Linguistics could be of great help as he or she could help combine the theoretical bases of learning and teaching languages with the classroom reality in a specific context. In addition, well prepared teachers would provide the students with the appropriate classroom language so that they receive the necessary oral input. (Salaberri, 1995).

The truth is that not many teachers pay attention to authors, and it was not easy to know about them, but nowadays thanks to the Internet, anyone can have access to the professional data of well known authors. If you use a search engine, found for example at www.google.com, you can look for any of the authors of the current methods. One of the best authors for children books is Herbert Puchta (2004), expert in the application of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences’ theory (1983). In contrast, other authors were just private school teachers without solid knowledge of the processes involved in the cognitive and physical development of children or of language teaching methods and approaches.

3. ADEQUACY TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

In these levels the curriculum for foreign languages is very open and just indicates the degree of adequacy with the three main areas involved in young children’s education:

Communication and Representation



Personal Identity and Autonomy

Social and Physical Environment

Social and Physical Environment. The child has to...

- Work in groups taking into account the other members of the group.
- Be aware of the rules of social behavior and establish balanced links with others.
- Be able to move and act independently in their usual surroundings.
- Observe and explore their physical and social environment.
- Know the most frequent ways of organizing human lives, and valuing their use.
- Value the importance of the natural environment and show attitudes of respect and care.
- Establish some relationships between the physical environment and the different forms of life.
- Know and participate in celebrations, traditions and customs of their areas.
- Observe changes in elements of their surroundings.
- Show interest and curiosity towards the physical and social environments, developing spontaneity and originality.

Personal Identity and Autonomy. The child has to...

- Have a positive image of him/herself.
- Identify his/her own abilities and limits.
- Show a respectful attitude in front of other people.
- Learn his/her motor, sensory and expressive abilities.
- Acquire the coordination and control of his/her own body.
- Develop more and more visual and hand coordination.
- Identify and communicate their own feelings and needs, respecting those of others.
- Be responsible for taking the initiative, plan and cooperate with other people in daily routines.
- Develop attitudes of help and cooperation with the others.
- Acquire habits related with well-being and personal hygiene and health.

Communication and Representation. The child has to be able to...

- Express orally feelings and ideas.
- Understand the intentions and messages from other people.
- Understand and reproduce some traditional rhymes, songs and stories.
- Be interested in the written language as a means of communication.
- Be interested and appreciate their own artistic work, as well as that of others.
- Use the different ways of representation and expressions to tell real or imaginary situations.

- Use representation and expression techniques to increase their communicative possibilities.
- Use linguistic and extra linguistic means to reinforce the meaning of messages.
- Use mathematical representations to describe objects and situations of their environment.

The new educational law also mentions the Total Physical Response (Asher 1977) as the most suitable methodology and recommends using songs and rhymes in the young learner classroom.

4. UNDERLYNG PEDAGOGY

All coursebooks are written considering a certain methodology, even if the author is not aware of this fact. By analysing the type of activities and exercises (Celce-Murcia, 1979), the way contents are introduced and grammar is treated, we can figure out what the underlying pedagogy is.

A course for very young learners should be based on the Total Physical Response method. It should offer an oral approach, emphasizing the use of songs, rhymes and games. All those should be combined with orders or movements, typical from the TPR method. Children's physical response activates memory, as meaning is understood through actions (Richards & Rogers, 1986).

We can mathematically take into account how many words are taught per page or unit and analyse the relevance of those words or expression for children, or the degree of revision of the words already known from previous units in the book. In the same way, we can write down the number and type of activities involved in each lesson, and what skills are involved.

This first account gives us an idea of the number and type of activities used. To see the amount of practice devoted to a particular skill, such as listening comprehension, in a coursebook, we just have to add the percentage of the activities which are involved in this skill and compare the amount with the result of the same calculation coming from other books, or with the other skills from the same method to compare. We have taken as an example one of the existing books for four year olds. The activities related with "listening comprehension" are the following (the percentage to the right representing the comparison with the rest of the activities in the book):

It might seem that the other activities (devoted to speaking) in the book make up the rest, that is 15,1% but we have to take into account that some of the other activities, such as *Listen and sing along*, *Listen and repeat* or *Listen and answer* (= 15,2%) have both skills in combination. Therefore, we could consider that the amount of practice devoted to speaking is 30,3%.

There are many activities which integrate several skills at the same time and integrate metacognitive skills, such as guessing the words, sequencing, classifying, and artistic skills (colouring, drawing, cutting, pasting, and moulding).

Then, there is the order in which the activities appear and which skills they practise first. The right sequence should follow the pattern of mother tongue acquisition: listening, speaking, and then, when possible, reading and writing (Madrid y McLaren, 1995).

Listen to the dialogue	11,3%
Listen to the song	15%
Listen to the story	7%
Listen and point	3%
Listen and show the flashcard	2,5%
Listen and draw	6,7%
Listen and play bingo	0,3%
Listen and repeat	4%
Listen and answer	2%
Listen and colour	5%
Listen and mime the actions	6,9%
Listen and sing along	9,2%
Listen and order the pictures	2,4%
Listen and match	5,5%
Total	84,9

Although there are not specific regulations for very young children methodology, in the Common European Framework (CEFR): we have to take into account its guidelines for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum, examinations, textbooks, etc. The level that children have to reach at the end of the pre-school education should be A1, at least in the oral skills:

- Spoken interaction: The child can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help him/her formulate what he or she is trying to say. He or she can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
- Spoken production: The student can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where he/she lives and people he /she knows.
- Listening: The pupils can recognize familiar words or very basic phrases concerning themselves, their families and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.

In fact the University of Cambridge offers the YLE, the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests in three levels (starters, movers and flyers) which are carefully designed to be

as enjoyable and stress-free a possible. They cover the four skills although the emphasis is on speaking and listening skills. The highest of these levels is the Flyers, at A2 level of the CCEF, while Starters and Movers are at level A1. (ALTE, 2003)

The importance of **contents** taught with the method chosen is enormous. The English language taught has to be familiar and significant for the children, otherwise, they will forget it immediately (Vila,1993).

Children learn with enjoyable activities, as Gardner said, content influences children's cognitive development. If they find the content and activities boring or too difficult, they will not remember the words or the stories at all, and they can become apathetic or even aggressive. Learning a foreign language as communication should not be a goal in itself, but a means for developing the children's mental capacity in general. Motivation is a key factor for successful language learning in general, but particularly in the case of the children, who are naturally willing to learn and participate in the classroom (Tragante and Muñoz, 2000).

This is an enormous advantage which should be taken into account. In most coursebooks, these criteria are considered and they present the most important content significant for children, which are basically the following ones:

Greetings	Seasons
Introductions	The weather
Leave takings	The family
Suggestions	The colours
Numbers	The parts of the body
Instructions	The animals
The school	Expressing their feelings
The house	Food and drink
Toys	Likes and dislikes
Clothes	

Regarding these topics, the materials used have to be very flexible to suit children's characteristics because they are physically very active and they need movement. Therefore, as we already mentioned, the perfect teaching method for them is the TPR. The course has to offer enough songs, games and activities which make children move. These activities have to be attractive for them, as they are very enthusiastic with the activities they like. If they do not like it or it is too difficult, they abandon it quickly.

As young learners cannot concentrate for a long period of time, the teaching materials should provide teachers with a large number of activities because children need to change activities every five or ten minutes. Apart from the number of activities, it is important to consider their variety as a multi-sensorial approach which is then needed to promote the different ways of learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1987).

English courses have to help teachers develop children’s imagination and creativity, so contents could be disguised in stories, which is the most enjoyable way of learning for children. Content has to be attractive, but at the same time provide routines, as children need routines in their lives and in the classroom as they feel comfortable with them.

It is important to check that constant review is provided. Children learn very fast, since they have a good short term memory, but they forget very quickly (Jiménez Catalán, 1998).

They love games, songs, singing, dancing, nursery rhymes with repetition and movements, and stories (with familiar elements, or well known characters). Stories should be repeated with repeated sentences which they can anticipate and have a happy end. Young learners have a good capacity for imitation and are good at learning phonetics and intonation (Alcaraz & Moody, 1983).

From five/six on, children can control their movements better and they love **arts and crafts** activities, so coursebooks for those ages should increase the number of these activities which could be taken home to be shown to the families.

On the other hand, so much repetition in stories is not needed and children start enjoying finding a surprise element in stories.

“Older” children are more social and enjoy group activities where they could play with their classmates. Materials have to consider then, all these points.

Last but not least, **the price** is a key factor for selecting a book. Sometimes you know that the families of the students in your class cannot afford to pay for expensive books as they have financial difficulties and cannot cope with the burden of all school materials.

If the English course is an all-in-one course-book/activity-book with CD or cassette included, it can be recommended. If children need to buy a set of five or six elements costing a fortune, teachers should consider this point before prescribing those materials.

All these elements can be summarized in the following chart:

Sample Checklist for Textbook Evaluation (Varela, 2003)

Student’s Textbook

Physical format	-	+	++
Is the cover attractive and meaningful?			
Is the cover and binding durable?			
Is the format suitable (horizontal, large margins)?			
Is the paper suitable (can you see through)?			
Is the number of pages adequate?			
Is the size and type of font suitable for children?			
Subject Matter			
Are the topics interesting for the children?			
Are the topics arranged in a logical way?			
Is the content graded in difficulty?			
Is the content bias-free?			
Is the content suitable for the curriculum?			
Are the characters attractive for children?			
Is the content related to other areas of the curriculum?			

Vocabulary and Structures			
Is the vocabulary significant for the age group? Is there constant revision of the vocabulary and structures learnt? Are vocabulary and structures introduced in context? Do the structures gradually increase in complexity?			
Graphic Elements			
Are the illustrations clear and simple, suitable for young children? Do they depict the situation or exercise as it is mentioned in the teacher's book? Are the drawings suitable for the cognitive complexity of the children's age?			
Other Useful Information:			
Are the authors a good team combining teaching experience and solid pedagogical background? Are the authors fluent in English? Is the price fair? Is there an audio CD/cassette included in the book? Is it a reusable student's book? Is it possible to use the book without the recommended extra-material?			

Many English methods come along with **flashcards, wall charts, cards**, etc. so that teachers who use them have many different visual resources to reinforce the lessons they teach. But, of course not all flashcards or posters are the same. Some are useful and appealing and others just the opposite.

Wall charts have to be big enough to be seen by all students in the class, but easy to handle at the same time. There are some calendar-like posters which come together and can be easily hung on the blackboard or put on the teacher's table. They usually offer at least one picture to review the vocabulary of each term. Posters which are folded and stored in a file are easily broken and those which are rolled and stored are difficult to hold straight.

Flashcards are very useful for presenting vocabulary. They should come in boxes of at least 80 flashcard per level with the name in capitals and small letters at the back. They can be classified by letters or by topics (clothes, food, toys, etc.). The drawings have to be appealing for the children and the meaning has to be completely clear. For older children instead of drawings photos can be used. Most publishing houses offer an alphabetical index of flashcards and some tips and activities which can be performed in the classroom with them.

The size of flashcards is also important. To be seen from the back of the classroom, they should be at least A4 size. For teachers of small children should have both large and small sizes for playing cards or memory games in small groups.

Summing up, we can answer these questions:

- Do the flashcards show all the words taught in the course book?
- Are all of them easy to understand? (Try to guess the meaning first without looking at the words at the back).

- Are the pictures attractive?
- Can the flashcards be seen from all points in the classroom?
- Can the words on the flashcards be read from all points in the classroom? (They help children identify the first words, and prepare them for reading).
- Is the material firm enough to last for at least a couple of years?
- Can they be easily stored and classified in a box?

Regarding audio materials, the first choice a teacher has to do is if he or she prefers a cassette or a CD. We all know the advantages or disadvantages of both, and we guess this choice depends on the school budget and equipment, although nowadays the prices for CD players are about the same as cassette recorders. As everyone knows, CDs are lighter, easier to store, more durable, their sound has a better quality than cassettes, and it is easier to go to a certain teaching point.

Then, you can look at the accents of the speakers. They should be native speakers with good pronunciation, as it will be the model the students have to follow. It does not mean that only British English must be shown. On the contrary, it is positive to find some American English from the beginning.

The voices of the speakers are also important. They should present feminine, masculine, voices of different ages, especially children or animal-like characters. They have to be good actors with the capacity of reproducing a certain situation. The speed is also important as young learners cannot cope with the normal speed and need a very clear and slow pronunciation.

Every unit should include a short rhythmic song that is repetitive so the children can sing along they learn (Halliwell, 1993).

The most important aspects that we should take into account are presented in the following chart:

Audio-Visual Aids (Varela, 2003)

Flashcards	-	+	++
Can they be seen from the back of the class?			
Are the words clearly represented?			
Are they bias-free?			
Are they durable?			
Is the type of illustration /photo suitable for the age group?			
Are the words written (both with small and capital letters) at the back?			
Do they come in an easy to carry and store box?			
Are they classified by topics, units, or alphabetical order in the box?			
Posters			
Are they comfortable to transport?			
Can they be easily displayed?			
Can they be easily stored?			
Do they contain the significant vocabulary taught in a period of time (month, term, week)?			
Are the illustrations attractive?			
Are the words illustrated in a realistic context?			
Are the items clear?			
Are there removable elements (stickers, etc.)?			
Are there songs or games associated to them?			

Audio CD / Cassettes			
Is there only one?			
Is the speed suitable?			
Are voices clear and understandable?			
Are there songs?			
Are there rhymes?			
Are there stories?			
Are there dialogues?			
Are there different voices?			
Can you gradually listen to different accents?			

The new curriculum recommends start working with **computers** from the very first course of pre-school education. Therefore, some publishing houses are issuing CD-ROM especially designed for children (Heinemann) which could be very useful for offering enjoyable learning experiences to children. At the same time that they allow young students to get familiar with computers.

Evaluation of those CD-ROM can be also done, analysing the pedagogy, the techniques used and programme design. Therefore, the following factors will be studied: pedagogic, technical and functional (Varela, 1998).

The most important **pedagogic factors** are:

- the adequacy of the content and exercises to the level or age of the students
- the adequacy of the methodology employed
- the variety, grade of difficulty, the level of participation of the students and the teachers

The **technical criteria** make reference to:

- the general functionality of the programme
- to the integration of the different media and materials appropriate to the didactic objective

The **functional criteria** analyse

- if the design of the programme takes into account the flexibility required for the learning and teaching of languages (e.g. the possibility of recording or help functions).

Here you have a sample of evaluation checklist. Each question in which the answer is “yes” can be considered positive.

Interactive CD (Varela 1998)

PEDAGOGIC CRITERIA	Yes (+)	No (-)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does it include a demonstration? ▪ Is the content of the CD-ROM appropriate for the course? ▪ Are the objectives of the programme made clear? Are they adequate to the needs of the class? ▪ Are the instructions brief and clearly explained, thus allowing the student and the teachers to understand what they each have to do? ▪ Are the graphic elements attractive and suitable for young children? ▪ Is there a familiar character (pet or similar) who is present along the whole programme to help the children telling them what to do, rewarding them, or giving them tips whenever they are doing something wrong? ▪ Is the level of language equivalent to that specified? ▪ Is the level of language appropriate to the ages of the users? ▪ Is it designed for use solely by individuals or does it permit usage by groups? ▪ Is it able to be used in an independent manner or is some written back-up support needed by the teacher? ▪ How is the input received? (Multiple choice, point and click, etc.) ▪ How many re-attempts are permitted? If the answer is incorrect, is an explanation offered, are clues given? If the response is correct, is the child automatically moved on to the next exercise? Is he/she offered a reward? Are notes made of the time taken, errors committed, number of attempts, etc.? Whenever the programme is started, does the programme follow the same procedure or is there an element of chance involved? ▪ Is there a sufficient quantity and variety of practical exercises? Does it lack content errors? ▪ Does the teacher have access to the student’s daily progress or errors? ▪ Is there an option to work with either British or American English? Is there an option to listen to oral texts spoken by a female and a male? Are children voices included? ▪ Is it possible to make recordings, allowing the comparison of pronunciation and intonation? Does it present socio-cultural information? Does it lack any possible forms of discrimination - sexual, racial, religious? ▪ Does it include a glossary or dictionary? Does it equally promote the four linguistic skills? ▪ Do the students enjoy using the programme? 		
TECHNICAL CRITERIA		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation: is it motivating? Are the images and graphics of good quality? ▪ If numbers or letters appear, is their size large enough? ▪ Is the programme operated solely by the mouse? ▪ Is it possible to work with the tactile screen? ▪ Is it possible to exit the programme without having to restart the computer? ▪ Is the use of headphones and microphones permitted? ▪ Is the programme able to be loaded easily and effectively? 		
FUNCTIONAL CRITERIA		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does it lack execution errors? ▪ Is the programme able to be used without any previous knowledge of I.T.? ▪ Is there easy access to the instructions? ▪ Are they clearly presented? ▪ Is the options menu clearly and well presented? ▪ Are the graphics and images adequately used with music and sound? ▪ Is it possible to directly access any part of the programme? ▪ Is it possible to exit the programme at any moment, i.e. without having to finish the exercise? 		

Finally, we could point out that the teacher book is a very important element of the course which has to be especially considered. A good teacher's book makes all the difference for a young children course, as textbooks do not have instructions or text.

Here you can find a template as an example of evaluation.

Sample Checklist for Textbook Evaluation

Teacher's book (Varela, 2003)

Physical Format	-	+	++
Is it easy to handle? Is it bilingual? Does it provide extra information sheets (student's progress, calendar, etc.)? Does it show the student's book / activity book in a clear way? Does it include the student's book and workbook? Does it include a diskette/ CD with the syllabus? Is it four colours? Is there place for your own notes, CD, etc.?			
Page Layout			
Can you see on the student's book the same page, with all the necessary teaching tips, solutions to the activities, transcriptions etc? Can you see the solutions to the activity book clearly solved? Are there the transcriptions of the audios?			
Content			
Are there enough warm-up activities before the units? Are the objectives clearly expressed? Are the solutions to the activities and exercises correct and clear? Are there enough teaching tips for carrying out the activities? Are there optional activities for various types of learners? Are there enough consolidation and practise activities? Are there enough extra activities? Are there extra socio-cultural explanations? Are there photocopiable sheets for extra activities (arts and crafts, games, etc.)?			

Sample Checklist for Textbook Evaluation

Young Learners’ English Courses Available on the Market

We will mention the best courses (in our opinion) available in the market for children aged from 3-6.

Publishing House	Title	Age group	Components	Main characteristics	Author(s)
Cambridge University Press:	<i>Cool English</i> (Spanish version)/ <i>Join In</i> (International version)	Starting from 1 st year of Primary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil’s book - Activity book - Teacher’s book - Video - Flashcards - CD-ROM - Holiday Pack 	Toby the Tiger is the main character of this book. It grows with the children over the years. The authors present different activities which involve music, language, movement, spatial relations, logic, etc. to stimulate children’s intelligence	Günter Gerngross & Herbert Puchta
Richmond Publishing	<i>Little Smarties</i>	3, 4 & 5 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity book - Student CD - Teacher’s book - Classroom CD - Puppet - Storyboard - Cards - Big Book 	It’s based on traditional stories, songs and rhymes. The book revolves around Granny; an endearing character who guides the children and helps the teacher through the three levels.	María Jesús Díaz
	<i>Playground Fun</i>	2 levels for 4 & 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student book - Activity book - Teacher’s book - Class cassette - 3 Posters - Fun Pack 	It is an English workshop for children. It is a versatile option for children and teachers, to introduce the learning of a new language. It is ideal for classes with few hours of English or as a complement to another method. It is based on crafts, games and songs, activities with a direct relation to the children’s world.	Richmond Team
Heinemann	Here’s Robby	Pre-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils Book - Poster Pack - Puppet - Audio CD - Teacher’s book 	It is an introductory level to Robby Rabbit, a 3-level story-based course for very young children starting English. (2 levels)	Carol Read & Ana Soberón
	Robby Rabbit	1 & 2 Cycle Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil’s book - Teacher’s book - Class CD - Puppet - Flashcards - Teacher’s book 	With the puppet, Robby Rabbit, lessons are introduced with a routine providing a friendly and helpful presence for children to relate stories with lots of activities.	Carol Read & Ana Soberón
	Little Elephant	1 & 2 Cycle Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils book - Teacher’s book - Cassette - Poster Pack - Flashcards - Big Book 	It is a story-based course including a Big Book, and posters with re-usable stickers. It focuses on listening and speaking and only introduces reading and writing in the second level.	Pilar Pérez Esteve & Vicent Roig Estruch

Oxford	Galaxy	1, 2 & 3 Cycle Primary	- Class book - Floppover book - Resource Pack - Teacher's book - Evaluation Pack - Audio CD	It provides many activities which stimulate children's fantasy and imagination. It offers much repetition and recycling.	Alison Blair, Jane Cadwallader Kathryn Harper & Paul Shipton
	Teddy's Train	Pre-primary 4 - 6 years old	- Activity book - Teacher's book - Cassette - Flashcards - Poster - Teacher's Resource Pack	It's based on classroom routines which help children participate and feel confident.	Lucia Tomas & Vicky Gil
	Happy House	5 - 7 years old 1 Cycle Primary	- Student's book - Activity book - Teacher's book - Cassette - Flashcards - Poster - Teacher's Resource Pack	Based on stories. Reading and writing start.	Estella Maidment, Lorena Roberts. Bill Bowler & Sue Parminter

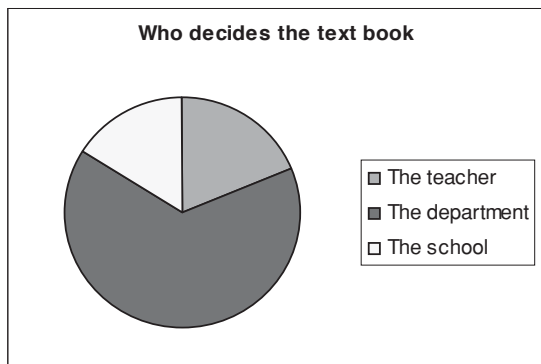
5. CONCLUSION

Although many members of the educative community are making efforts to build up evaluation templates for all kind of teaching and learning materials, many teachers are still deciding the textbook they are using because of other reasons. We have tried to ask some teachers about this matter, and although the number of the sample (37) is not representative, they have given us an insightful first impression.

We have asked some English teachers in early childhood education (20 in Córdoba, 5 in Madrid and 12 in Galicia) how they choose a text book. We handed out a very simple questionnaire:

Questionnaire	
Tick on the right option:	
a) When you choose a text book...	
–	You decide on your own
–	You decide taking into account the opinion of your colleagues
–	Your headmaster or head of studies decides for you
b) If you have to decide you consider the following aspects:	
–	Lay-out
–	Number of pages
–	Number of units
–	Number of words taught
–	Relevance of the contents
–	Type of the activities presented
–	Treatment of the skills
–	Methodology
–	Supplementary material
–	Authors
–	Other factors.....
c) Have you ever used an evaluation template?	
–	Yes
–	No
d) If “yes”, was it created by...	
–	Yourself
–	You and your colleagues
–	Someone else

The result can be seen on this graph:



Most teachers decide together with their colleagues or department the textbooks which are going to be used. In some private schools, the management has decided in favour of a certain publishing house for the books of all subjects, in exchange for some type of “gift” such as electronic equipment or books for the library.

Regarding the other questions from b), all the teachers have said that they usually take into account all the factors. Only in the case of authors, 12 (32,4%) people do not consider this point at all when choosing a coursebook.

The last question was open, and four people (10,8%) “have confessed” to choose text books because of the free extra materials given by the sales persons (puppet, big books, videos) and because of the friendship with a sales person.

In c) 100% are not using any templates, so question d) is not enlightening.

We can conclude that although teachers are trying to somehow analyse the materials they are given, they do not have enough theoretical background to do so, and they prefer to meet at the staff room and discuss with their colleagues about the matter.

Of course this first approach is only an attempt for what can be done in further research. We encourage other colleagues to deal with this subject and obtain more relevant data on this subject.

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