

SURVEY REVIEW

Secondary EFL courses

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Introduction by Melanie Williams

This survey review of secondary EFL courses looks at eight courses which have appeared in the last 3 years. Teachers in this sector are well aware of how many new courses are appearing for this age group and realize that it would not be possible to review them all here. However, the issues that the reviewers identify as being significant for their teaching situations and which they explore in the materials are ones that are pertinent for all teachers of this age group. The reviewers are from different parts of the world and all work in different sectors of the education system.

Teaching teenagers can be a demanding task. Classes with a mix of educational and language backgrounds are a reality for many teachers. Learners may have studied English in primary, but it is not a certainty that everyone did or that they studied to the same level. Learners may not share the same mother tongue either, making more traditional methods of teaching less effective. This is a description of *mixed-ability* in anyone's book. But, groups of teenage learners are always mixed-ability and for many teachers of this age group this is one of the very positive aspects of the process. The mix of maturity levels, interests, enthusiasms, and sizes gives the classes a vitality that more homogenous groups lack.

Motivation is one of the aspects of teaching teenagers which all the reviewers comment on with reference to their teaching situations and to the materials. Teenagers need to be able to connect with their study materials, and the topics need to be relevant to their lives and to their concerns. This is not always easy in a global market where what is relevant in one context might not work in another. Technology is perhaps something that appeals to all students. These *digital natives*, as one of the reviewers refers to them, are completely at ease with technology and eager to absorb what it has to offer. Teenagers are also always keen to find out more about modern culture: the language, the details, and the nuances.

Clearly, the teaching approach has an impact on motivation and success in the classroom. This is a more difficult one to get right. 'Learner training', 'learner autonomy', 'reflection', and 'taking responsibility for learning' are all terms commonly used these days with reference to teaching and learning. Surely, everyone says, it is positive for learners to take more responsibility for their learning. And the general agreement seems to be that it is. But how this process is managed is significant. Teenage students

tend to be very dependent on their teachers. Setting the learners on a path to less dependency so that they feel positive about the process and do not feel abandoned by the teacher is not necessarily straightforward. Two of the reviewers explore this area in detail with reference to the courses.

But what about the teachers? What support do the courses offer them? What background information, on culture for example, what photocopiable materials for mixed-ability groups, what technological materials are available for the teachers to enable them to deliver the teaching/learning package successfully? Teachers can be intimidated by extensive teaching packages which offer everything the learners could wish for, without seeming to take account of the teacher's needs. All four reviewers comment on the teacher's support materials which are available with the courses they review.

Finally, the consensus seems to be that teenage learners should develop a feeling of confidence and be able to communicate successfully in this ever-changing world. The Common European Framework of Reference serves as a reminder that the focus should always be on what learners *can* do at different levels. This is particularly important at lower levels where, in the past, learners might have been reminded rather too often of what they *cannot* do yet.

In the reviews below, each reviewer provides a broad overview of their two sets of course materials. Reviews then focus in on the elementary levels of each of the eight courses, with each reviewer analysing the materials from their particular perspective.

Name of the course	Authors	Publishers
<i>Engage</i>	A. Artusi and G. J. Manin	Oxford University Press
<i>American Adventures</i>	B. Wetz and M. Gammidge	Oxford University Press
<i>English in Mind</i>	H. Puchta and J. Stranks with R. Carter and P. Lewis-Jones	Cambridge University Press
<i>Messages</i>	D. Goodey, N. Goodey, M. Craven, and M. Levy	Cambridge University Press
<i>Inspiration</i>	J. Garton-Sprenger and P. Prowse	Macmillan
<i>Smash</i>	L. Prodromou and M. Crawford	Macmillan
<i>Challenges</i>	M. Harris, D. Mower, and A. Sikorzynska	Pearson Longman
<i>Success</i>	J. Comyns-Carr, J. Parsons, S. Mckinlay, and B. Hastings	Pearson Longman

Feryal Varanoglulari is the reviewer of the *Engage* and *American Adventures* series. Feryal's particular focus is on listening and speaking skills and she compares how these skills are dealt within *Engage 1* and *American Adventures Elementary*.

Engage and American Adventures

Claude Lopez is the reviewer of the *English in Mind* and *Messages* series. Claude looks in detail at *English in Mind 1* and *Messages 1* for his discussion of how effective and efficient communication is promoted through these courses.

Eva Gansrigler is the reviewer of the *Inspiration* and *Smash* series. Eva's particular interests are differentiation and the development of learner autonomy, and she compares what *Inspiration 2* and *Smash 2* have to offer students and teachers in these respects.

Liliane Pessanha is the reviewer of the *Challenges* and *Success* series. Liliane considers the needs of the *digital natives* and looks at how *Challenges 1* and *Success Elementary* develop the learners' sense of achievement and responsibility for learning.

Pop culture plays a significant part in most teenagers' lives these days, as does technology. In fact, it could even be argued that technology, with the use of computers, MP3 players, and video games, plays an even greater role in their daily lives. Teenagers enjoy learning English by having fun and this can make them challenging to teach. It is difficult to control and understand them in real life and the same applies for teaching as well. So it is important that in the classroom teachers are able to motivate and interest these multilevel learners.

Engage is an American English course designed for young adolescents. *Engage* has four levels from Starter to Level 3. Starter is at beginner level, Level 1 is at elementary level, Level 2 is at pre-intermediate level, and Level 3 is at intermediate level. Each level comes with a student's book, a workbook, a teacher's book, an audio CD, and tests. Each level also has a set of photocopiable mixed-ability worksheets making the series particularly suitable for mixed-ability classes. It has a topic-based syllabus and learners are provided with appropriate and varied visual support. Topics are relevant and designed to appeal to students of this age. Each unit of *Engage* focuses on a different topic from the real world. Teacher's Book 1 states 'A wide range of topics and formats are used, mixing cultural and cross-curricular features with more light-hearted presentations' (p. iv). In each unit, two sets of new vocabulary and grammar are presented and practised. There is also extra vocabulary input in the workbook under the heading of 'Extend your vocabulary'. There is one of these features for each spread in the workbook. Each unit of *Engage* includes communication activities called 'Over to you', which are designed to help students consolidate the language points from the unit in a fun and interesting way. The final section of each unit, called 'Living English', aims to develop students' receptive and productive language skills.

In addition to providing varied skills practice, *Engage* also aims to encourage learner autonomy with the inclusion of 'Study skills' sections in some of the review units. *Engage* seems ideal for classes who have mixed-ability learners. As well as the photocopiable mixed-ability worksheets mentioned above, there is also an 'Engage magazine' section at the end of the student's book, which has extra grammar and vocabulary activities, puzzles, and games. These can be used with the whole class, for example as warm-up or end-the-lesson activities as well as by fast finishers.

Engage 1 with its rich cross-curricular content is clearly suitable for elementary students. Throughout the 12 units, the aim is to develop students' language skills and knowledge of grammar through a topic-based syllabus. Teenagers are interested in the world around them and what *Engage* aims to do is engage teenagers with the world around them. The book does this by exploring American culture through fun activities on everyday topics such as 'Consumer world', 'One of a kind', 'Mysteries', and 'Alternative travel'. The topics are varied but the task types are not as varied as the topics. Rubrics are clear and there is a systematic coverage of new language within the student's book and the workbook. New language is well contextualized throughout *Engage 1* and the combination of a clear, well-paced syllabus with strong visuals seems particularly effective. The objectives which are laid out in the map of the book are well implemented in the lessons and units. Each unit of the book is laid out in the same way, making it easy to follow. It focuses on grammar, building vocabulary, and reading mainly. Most units also have listening and speaking practice at the dialogue-formation level. In each unit, students start exploring the topic of the unit through vocabulary introduction activities and then move on to the grammar introduction/focus after a meaningful context has been created. Units culminate in 'Over to you' activities that encourage students to personalize the language. In the 'Living English' sections, learners are encouraged to put into practice the vocabulary and grammar points they have just learnt.

American Adventures is a four-level course with starter, elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels. Each level includes a student's book, workbook, a teacher's book, a class audio CD, photocopiable worksheets, and tests plus a website for students and teachers. It is suitable for high school students. It is a topic-based course which will appeal to teenage interests. *American Adventures* aims to introduce core grammar, vocabulary, and skills at starter and elementary levels and then extend and consolidate this knowledge at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. Each unit is divided into clear sections. Units start with a 'Take a look!' section which introduces students to the objectives of the unit and to key vocabulary, generally through listening activities. Following this are three distinct but linked sections, 'a', 'b', and 'c'. New language is introduced through reading or listening texts and there is always a focus on skills practice. In some units, there is additional study skills work. Each unit ends with a 'Progress check' or revision section. After every second unit, there is a 'World of English' section. These consolidate the language from the previous two units and provide additional cultural information relating to the themes in the section. Each 'World of English' section also includes a spread on 'The world/story of pop' with a current pop song. The workbooks provide systematic practice of the language from the student's book. The photocopiable worksheets provide additional skills extension and pair work activities.

American Adventures Elementary aims to turn learning English into an exciting experience and adventure. *American Adventures Elementary* has ten units and grammar structures and functions are presented through reading and listening. Students can further check/review their understanding of the new grammar by referring to the 'Grammar' sections at the back of the

student's book. Vocabulary is developed as it relates to the topic of the unit and there is a consistent focus on the development of writing skills in section 'c' of each unit. Pronunciation practice is integrated in the various activities, with specific focus activities appearing in section 'b'. The unit objectives are easily accessible to elementary students and are achievable as well. The layout is clear and will be attractive to teenage students, with use of photos and illustrations to provide context and support. The real-life topics are part of teenagers' real lives, for example 'Superhuman', 'Prizes', 'Pop!', 'The material world'.

Developing listening and speaking skills at elementary level

Listening and speaking activities in *Engage 1* and *American Adventures Elementary* both give emphasis to reception and production suitable for students at this level.

Engage 1 develops listening for general understanding mainly through monologues, some interviews, and the recognition of sounds and words. Listening tasks are generally at recognition level of single pieces of information. The topics of the listening texts relate to the real world and are about the same characters as the reading texts, making them more accessible to students. Audio CDs are only for use with the student's book and do not include listening activities for every unit. However, there is listening material for most units. Indeed, taking the book as a whole, gradual development of listening sub-skills as appropriate for this level is evident. *Engage 1* follows the philosophy of 'a listening context often contains visual clues . . . to support spoken words' (McDonough and Shaw 1993: 129). Considerable visual support is provided for listening activities and they really do support the recording and help understanding. A more detailed look at tasks shows that there is an initial context check question followed by more detailed comprehension questions. All recordings are on the CD and transcripts are available in the teacher's book. In addition, CDs have detailed track information.

Engage 1 develops speaking based on the grammar and vocabulary points of the units. Similar speaking task types are used throughout the units, for example listening to and reading sample dialogues, writing similar dialogues and then practising them with a partner, and pronunciation practice. There are no information gap activities or extra speaking practice tasks at the back of the student's book or in the teacher's book. The aim seems to be to develop dialogue creation and practice based on the language points of the unit.

American Adventures Elementary provides students with opportunities to listen to and understand a range of speakers in different situations. Unlike *Engage 1*, the recordings include radio programmes and interviews. However, like *Engage 1*, the texts are not authentic and they are graded from easy to more difficult to take account of the level of the students. In *Engage 1*, there is a maximum of one listening activity per unit. However, in *American Adventures Elementary*, there are two activities. The first listening activity in the unit aims to develop students' general understanding through practising listening for gist and the second activity aims to practise listening for specific information through different task types. In *American Adventures Elementary*, speaking tasks are quite different from those in

Engage 1. The teenage-appropriate topics are personalized and students practise the language presented in that unit through a variety of task types. It seems that the speaking tasks would give students a real reason to communicate. In the tasks, language is used as a vehicle for meaning, the primary aim being interaction and communication at a lower level. Apart from the speaking tasks in the student's book, there are additional photocopiable pair work activities for each unit of the book. These are all information gap activities.

Engage 1 and *American Adventures Elementary* are both topic-based coursebooks and they both consider the needs and interests of today's teenagers. Both *Engage 1* and *American Adventures Elementary* aim to develop all the language skills, but each book has a different balance of skills.

Engage 1 has recognition-level listening tasks and dialogue-building speaking tasks. *American Adventures Elementary* starts with recognition level followed by more detailed listening tasks and has students taking part in structured discussions and exchanges. Looking at *Engage 1* and *American Adventures Elementary* as a whole, they are quite successful at developing American English for young adolescents through interesting topics and a variety of tasks.

English in Mind and Messages

Before talking at length about the elementary levels of the two courses and their relevance to the topic of communicative activities themselves, a few words should be said about both of them. *English in Mind* is a six-level course taking learners from A1 to B2+ in terms of Common European Framework levels. *Messages* is a four-level course and spans Common European Framework levels A1/A1+ to B1.

English in Mind 1 is divided into four modules of four units each (16 lessons). *Messages 1* has six modules of two units each (12 lessons). At the beginning of both books, there is a chart describing the material covered in each unit. This provides the learner with a useful overview of the programme. At the beginning of modules, there is also a list of things that are going to be learnt.

There has been a prominent shift within the field of language learning and teaching over the last 20 years with greater emphasis being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. In parallel to this new shift of interest, how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand, learn, or remember the information has been the primary concern of the researchers dealing with the area of foreign language learning.

(Hismanoglu 2000)

This 'shift' seems to have been taken into account in both series. Teaching under this new 'emphasis' implies that learners are no longer passive. They take part in the learning process and fully participate in all the communicative strategies. They are more active, more responsible for the learning process, and are being taught not only the language they wish to learn but also the monitoring of their progress and its constant evaluation. Thus, both series ease the teaching process by involving the learner more. The teacher's role as an evaluator is made easier too: he/she can monitor

his/her students' progress in full cooperation with them. And the learners have a feeling of greater achievement since they are not only part of the process, but through the 'Check your progress' section at the end of every module in *English in Mind 1*, they can also evaluate themselves. This evaluation is also done through the ELT portfolio self-evaluation and the project activities at the end of the *English in Mind 1* student's book. *Messages 1* provides the learners with the same possibility with the 'How's it going?' section at the end of the review units. The feeling of being in charge of at least part of the task to be accomplished is an excellent incentive for working more and more effectively. 'Researchers have identified many characteristics of good language learners. But one of the most important features distinguishing a good language learner from a poor language learner is the amount of self-guided practice the learner does when alone' (Dickerson 1998).

Without losing his/her role, the teacher becomes a resource person, an advisor who facilitates the progress of his/her students. The learners have a more positive perception of cooperative teaching. The way they see the instructor is less negative since he/she is perceived in a new light: he/she is more a background facilitator to the learners than a judge. And the judging task is diluted by the mere fact that learners themselves also judge and evaluate their progress after every unit. 'Good language learners take personal responsibility for their own language learning. They do not assume that their instructor determines their success or that learning "just happens". Instead, they take the position: "I'm in charge of my own progress. If language learning happens, it will happen because I make it happen"' (Dickerson 1998).

As far as communicative strategies are concerned, the teacher's books in both *English in Mind 1* and *Messages 1* cover all necessary areas needed by the teacher to help learners in their endeavour to achieve a good use of the material presented. The teacher's books fully aim at and succeed in increasing the intelligibility of topics taught by providing the right approach in every aspect of the learning process.

In what ways is communication made more effective and efficient for learners in the elementary levels of the two series?

First and foremost, both courses address issues of interest to teenagers and the vocabulary used is that which can and will be used in every circumstance of life. Studies (e.g. Vandromme 2000) have proved that young learners adapt to the person they are communicating with. The feeling of being 'natural' is far greater when they are interacting with peers, an activity which is largely provided for by both series. Conversational phrases used throughout the books have a high frequency value. What is more, the 'Everyday English' parts of the units in *English in Mind 1* use vocabulary that young people use in the target language with their teenage peers. This part of the lexis is not ignored and the learners therefore have the feeling that they are indeed studying the 'real' language. Nothing in the vocabulary is beyond the reach of today's adolescents, and nothing is outdated or obsolete. There is a complete exposure to the 'real' English that is being currently used in British English-speaking environments. This is not emphasized in *Messages 1*. The part called 'Expressions' at the end of the modules lists phrases that are in no way the type of familiar or 'slangy' lexis that the learners appreciate learning. 'Authentic materials are

one way of narrowing the gap between world and classroom: by their use, acquisition and communication can be fostered, even in the classroom' (James 1991).

A great variety of topics is covered in both series. The general themes of units are varied and cover interesting topics that are of real importance to the learners, making communication a real, close-to-life activity and not an artificial exercise on themes that are non-issues because they are cut off from reality.

Grammar and vocabulary, speaking and functions, listening, reading, and writing are linked with the general theme of the unit in a natural way, and the exercises and communicative activities, be they oral or written, are also linked to it. The exercises are numerous and varied in their approach. Some are classic gap-filling activities, and others capitalize on the attraction adolescents have for games. They all involve practice of what was studied previously and use the different topics covered in the units (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation—with phonetic symbols, 'Everyday English' for *English in Mind 1*). Both series allow teachers to divide the class into different groups with a task to perform, giving an opportunity for all to participate orally. Pair work is also an important aspect of the communicative process. Learners can then perform before the whole class. The communication situation will also have a greater reality, avoiding the constant and unnatural pseudo-dialogue that generally takes place between the teacher and one learner in a traditional class situation! The teacher's resource packs for both series provide communication activities for the whole class for every single unit. Every part of the unit can call for oral input from the pupils. The only limitation here might be time: both series provide repeated occasions for verbal interaction, but school programmes are limited in time. It is paradoxically a good sign of success of the method used when learners do not want to leave a class because they want to carry on a discussion on a topic that they appreciate. This is bound to happen with both series, though *Messages 1* lists the communicative tasks at the beginning of the student's book with more details than *English in Mind 1*, giving the learners a better overview of all the communicative tasks they will be able to perform.

The teacher's books for *English in Mind 1* and *Messages 1* provide communicative activities at every stage of the learning process: there are opportunities for discussions with the learners for almost every entry in the teacher's notes, through oral interaction with the teacher and/or 'class competition'/game, pair working, and so on. The part devoted to written communicative activities (apart from the numerous written exercises provided by the books) in the form of essays is shorter, but nothing prevents teachers from giving more work in that area.

Some items are very interesting innovations: 'Study help' in *English in Mind 1* gives tips for memorizing and organizing knowledge in a practical user-friendly way. This is done less perfectly by *Messages 1* at the end of every module. 'Unit check' in *English in Mind 1* provides the learners with an opportunity to check whether they have mastered what was learnt in the previous unit before studying the next one. They have the possibility of marking themselves with a double system of marks or comments that range from 'Very good': 20–25; 'OK': 14–19; and 'Review Unit X again': 0–13.

Messages 1 has included a similar system in one section of 'Study skills' with a different grading system ('Good'/'Bad'/'I can't remember much') but this appears without any explicit suggestion for the learners to review the unit if they performed badly. Almost all categories of communicative expressions and skills, as they have been defined in Oxford's (1990) *Language Learning Strategies*, aiming at the development of communicative competence are present in both series.

In *English in Mind 1*, the student's book begins with a 'Starter' section. This is an absolute must after the long summer holidays after which most students always seem to have forgotten the basic elements of grammar and speech. This section covers the basic elements of communication. There is more than enough material in the student's book, the workbook, the teacher's book, and the teacher's resource pack to have a thorough revision of basic elements to start the programme of *English in Mind 1*. It might be useful to add a quick revision of instructions used in class. *Messages 1* lacks this very important reviewing unit and does not really take into account the need for a thorough revision. Its first unit entitled 'What you remember' does not give the learners the much needed reviewing session at the beginning of the first term.

The only thing that is missing in both books is a translation of the various words given in the glossary at the end of the book. At a virtual beginner level, this seems to be appropriate since learners will have difficulty using a monolingual dictionary. There are two different attitudes in language teaching: one that the mother tongue should never be used in a class context and the other that it can be used, though this very often produces a 'pidginization'. The solution might be to simply introduce a word list with translation into major European languages. Building on first or subsequent languages especially in multilingual countries can be useful. At a time when the emphasis is put on the European Language Portfolio, where several languages are to be taken into account in this portfolio, the taboo of this very modest use of the first language in a book should surely disappear. The vocabulary list given at the end of *English in Mind 1* is well presented and very helpful for the learners: it lists words by categories and by units (including the much-appreciated 'Everyday English'), and it is obviously the kind of reference list one learner can use in a more profitable way because of its practicality. The range of vocabulary in *Messages 1* is narrower. It is presented as a general list with an indication of the unit after each single word. This is like a mini-dictionary.

We often tend to forget that the very first step of communication deals with the contact between the learners and their learning tools. In both books, topics are presented in a remarkably pleasant way. Clarity is important for a textbook because the first impression learners have does not primarily concern the contents of the book, but the general aspect of the book they will have to cope with. The format, the page setting, the various iconographic tools, the different colours, and typography used do produce an impression of clarity in these two series. Things are clearly delineated and separated on every single page of the book using the aforementioned means, giving a distinct appearance to the various items presented and making learning a pleasant task. When learners like the book they are using,

their attitude towards learning is more positive and they are more inclined to perform better, or at least, they are less reluctant to start the learning process. In *Messages 1*, however, there are fewer photographs and more illustrations. Photo stories are absent from *Messages 1* which makes a big difference in terms of presentation of the material. Photo stories give a better image of the real world and are more pleasant to study with.

Grammar is an important topic. If the learners do not have correct (and detailed) grammar at their disposal in their books, the communicative process, oral or written, will suffer. One should also mention that, for practical reasons, the grammar reference section should also appear in the student's book (as in *Messages 1*) and not only in the workbook (as in *English in Mind 1*). It has to be said that the parts devoted to grammar theory are not thorough enough in either series, and the presentation of this reference grammar is limited, for example there are no pictures and no real incentive to concentrate on the topics presented. Content is important but presentation is important too, as was mentioned before. The contrast between the almost perfect, and sometimes outstanding, way the other parts of the series are presented and the way grammar is somehow neglected here is quite noticeable. There is a trend in language teaching to use a particular method and to supplement it with a grammar book coming from a different source. This should not have to be the case for either *English in Mind 1* or *Messages 1*.

In conclusion and notwithstanding these last remarks, both series are excellent and clearly emphasize communicative interaction as the means and the goal to be reached. Herbert Puchta (http://www.cambridge.org/elt/englishinmind/teacher_resources/interview_teacher.htm) during his interview with the Polish magazine *The Teacher* made the following statement:

[. . .] what do I regard as most important in teaching teenagers? I think we need to aim at establishing a classroom culture of rapport and mutual trust. When the students get the feeling they are accepted not only as learners but also as individuals, and when the classroom culture is one that allows for the strengthening of the students' self-esteem and confidence, then we have created the best basis for teaching teenagers successfully.

These objectives have been achieved perfectly with both series: learners and teachers work in full synergy.

Inspiration and Smash

Due to migratory movements within the European context, English language teachers are facing new and challenging language teaching situations in their classrooms. Not only are there students from different cultural, educational, and language backgrounds but also this mix of students often has different interests and levels of motivation. As teachers well know children develop at different rates and achieve different cognitive levels at different ages. This aspect added to the linguistic and cultural mix means that teaching teenagers is becoming ever more challenging.

A good coursebook provides ‘variety and a balanced diet of language work: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and skills work’ (Gower, Phillips, and Walters 2005: 77).

The conditions cited above cause the English teacher to search for a good coursebook, one that aids his/her lesson preparation and one that suits the needs and interests of everyone involved: the teacher and the learners. With the help of an efficient book, Gardner’s advice seems more easily achievable: ‘It’s very important that a teacher takes individual differences among kids very seriously . . .’ (Gardner in Guignon 1998).

Inspiration is a four-level course that caters for the multilevel language class of teenage students with varied learning styles, interests, and abilities. The course takes students from A1 to B1+ in terms of Common European Framework levels. Each level of *Inspiration* consists of a student’s book, a workbook, a teacher’s book, a class audio CD or cassette, an *Inspiration* companion, a test CD, and an *Inspiration* builder, which is a teacher’s resource pack.

Each student’s book contains eight units which are further subdivided into five sections. The topics are appropriate for the age group, for example ‘Lifestyle’, ‘Festivals’, ‘Making friends’, and are explored through a range of reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities. Grammar is clearly presented and practised and there is a welcome focus on integrated skills in section four of each unit. The activities throughout are interesting, motivating, and varied, making them suitable for a range of learners. Each unit ends with students working on a project which helps them consolidate, personalize, and extend their knowledge of language and content. Every odd-numbered unit ends with a ‘Culture’ section, while every even-numbered one ends with a ‘Review’ section of grammar and vocabulary from the preceding two units. At the end of each ‘Review’, students are reminded of what they *can* do and are encouraged to assess their progress by ticking ‘Fine’, ‘OK’, or ‘Not sure’ in response to the prompt ‘How good are you?’ Personal learning styles and learning strategies are explored in Student’s Books 3 and 4. At the end of each student’s book, there is a spread headed ‘Congratulations!’ In this section, learners are encouraged to reflect on and assess what they have achieved in the areas of communication, writing, reading, listening, and learner independence. Learning strategies are also included in this focus.

Both the student’s books and the workbooks focus on supporting and promoting independent learning. They provide review exercises for mixed abilities, as well as extension activities for students working more independently. Examples of the latter are: add these sections to your vocabulary notebook—colours, clothes, musical instruments, or using the phone (*Inspiration 1* workbook: 29).

The *Inspiration* teacher’s books provide a step-by-step approach on how to best exploit the materials and activities in class. The lesson notes include a range of ideas for warmers, optional activities, games, and homework plus full tape scripts and answer keys. In addition, the teacher’s books offer suggestions for more detailed study and provide teachers with additional information for the ‘Culture’ sections of the students’ books, which is

extremely helpful and very welcome. The teacher's resource packs contain photocopiable sheets and instructions for games and activities. Further support for teachers is available online at www.macmillaneducation.com/inspiration.

Inspiration companions are available in three languages: French, German, and Dutch. These companions provide students with well laid out, highly relevant reference material. The key vocabulary items from each unit are listed, then each is given in phonemic script, followed by a translation, and finally the item is used in a sample sentence. The companions also contain grammar summaries with mother tongue explanations, alphabetical lists of the vocabulary items at that level with unit and page references, and 'Vocabulary extra!' which provides further extensive revision of vocabulary with mother tongue support. An audio CD enables learners to independently review some of the listening activities.

Smash is a four-level course that also caters for the multilevel language class of teenage students and contains cross-curricular and cross-cultural themes. The course takes students from A1 to B1 in terms of Common European Framework levels. Each level of *Smash* consists of a student's book, a workbook, a teacher's book and resource pack, a class audio CD or cassette, and a CD-ROM for further study.

Each student's book contains ten units and each of these is split into three sections or 'lessons'. In addition, there is a fourth section for each unit: in Levels 1 and 2 this is called 'Smashmag', in Level 3 it is called 'Smash challenge', and in Level 4 it becomes 'Smash folio'. In Levels 1 and 2, units begin with a story which is presented as a colourful cartoon strip. Grammar and vocabulary are focused on and developed from this initial presentation. Each 'lesson' combines a focus on skills and grammar work, with the third lesson tending to focus more on functional language. 'Lessons' also contain a pronunciation file with reference materials at the end of the student's book (Levels 2 and 3). 'Smashmag' sections take a broader cultural and curricular focus, for example 'Shopping and pocket money' (*Smash 2*: 50). Within these sections, students have opportunities to develop their reading, writing, and speaking as well as their listening skills. Materials are topical and appropriate for the age group. 'Smash challenge' sections are similar to 'Smashmag', but are more appropriate for older students at a higher language level. 'Smash folio' sections extend the concept still further. After every second unit, there is a revision lesson, which reviews the vocabulary and grammar from the preceding two units. Other end matter includes communication activities (all levels), grammar summary (all levels), word list (all levels), stories (Levels 1 and 3), projects (Levels 2 and 4), and playlets (Levels 2 and 3).

Smash uses colourful, cartoon-like illustrations throughout to help bring the materials to life and to engage the learners. There is also generous use of colour on the page, to highlight features and to draw students' attention to different parts of the lessons.

Smash teacher's books provide detailed guidance for teachers on how to realize the lessons in the classroom. The notes are clear and would seem to be aimed at the less experienced teacher, providing timings for activities as well as examples of teacher language. The resource packs, which are part of the teacher's books, contain a wide range of activity material and templates for use in the classroom, for example pair work activities, games, and tests. In addition, there are photocopiable portfolio sections for assessment/self-assessment. These are for use after the revision units; the teacher completes one copy, the student another. Assessment is made with reference to what has been studied in the units, for example 'Family', 'Things in the house' (Level 2 teacher's book: 54) and students and teachers are encouraged to assess progress by ticking 'Needs more practice', 'Fine', or 'Good'.

Differentiation and developing learner autonomy at elementary level

Inspiration Student's Book 2

Although the students do not have the keys for the various activities, this book helps them to develop their autonomous learning. Firstly, they can work on the texts and the comprehension tasks individually. Secondly, students are given clear steps to follow, for example 'Make sentences using the past simple . . . Match them with the people. Listen and check'. The writing is well scaffolded and achievable for the learners at this level. It seems that the 'on the page' scaffolding of tasks is more reduced in Lessons 2 and 3 of the units. But learners are not left to flounder, quite the opposite. This approach is aimed at promoting independent working as the book gives hints on where they can find further help. Finally, as every unit includes advice on independent learning, students learn to revise individually and become more aware of what they as individuals need to focus on while learning, i.e. 'What does "knowing" a word mean? Which of these answers do you agree with? Compare with another student' (*Inspiration 2*: 63).

A rich variety of graded tasks in every unit in Workbook 2 fosters autonomous learning and beyond that caters for the various learner individualities. Tasks range from crossword completion activities to research tasks like 'Web watch: look up your favourite soap in English on a search engine' . . . and 'Brainteasers'. Students are further encouraged to reflect on their learning and on what they *can* do in the 'Progress check' sections of the workbook, which appear at the end of the revision sections.

With *Inspiration 2*, students would be able to study on their own, given the clear structure of the lessons within the units and the support given in the workbook. It further supplies sufficient exercises for successful learning as it addresses the different learning styles continuously. Students at the elementary level need guidance to develop responsibility and a sense of competence for their independent learning. This guidance is given them through the 'learner independence' sections, which appear throughout the student's book.

At first sight, *Smash 2* seems ideally suited for all the different language learners in a class. Learners are provided with appropriate reading materials at varying readability levels, but with too little guidance for some of the basic levels, for example *Smash 2* (p. 17). Elementary learners of this age need

support and scaffolding from the teacher or the book and will only be able to work independently when the tasks are clear. It is true that the contents of this book will trigger quicker learners, but it does not contribute well to independent learning. However, scaffolding for the project activities at the end of the student's book and within the workbook is more clearly evident, and it would seem that it is in these components that promotion of independent language learning is taking place. In addition, the CD-ROM is a helpful tool for developing learners' autonomy, easily accessible as it is on the computer. Students can revise and check their learning progress after every unit and choose activities according to their interests and/or needs. The fruitful revision exercises like matching exercises, crosswords to fill in, or other playful activities like 'shooting words' foster individual learning and seem to ideally support the autonomous learning process.

With their strong emphases on cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural syllabi, both *Inspiration 2* and *Smash 2* offer interesting and relevant material for the teenage classroom. It is also necessary that materials for this age group are applicable for mixed-level groups and include regular revision and recycling of lexis. Furthermore, books need to be attractive in terms of design and have activities that are motivating for all teenage learners. These factors are well addressed by both courses.

Supplementary materials, such as the CD-ROMs and the teacher's resource packs and, in the case of *Inspiration 2*, the *Inspiration* companion, offer further opportunities for differentiation and learner autonomy. Elementary learners need clearly structured tasks and it is essential that they are guided on their paths to independent learning. This systematic approach to learner training and the development of learner autonomy seems to be provided more consistently by *Inspiration 2*.

Comparing the two books, differentiation occurs more efficiently with *Inspiration*. The variety of tasks would clearly be a challenge for some learners, but they would be doable in the classroom as there is sufficient explanation and support for teachers and for learners. This approach offers individual learners the opportunity to develop and make progress within his/her 'zone of proximal development'. It helps learners begin to take over responsibility for their learning through the process of assessing their own skills and reflecting on their own progress and learning strategies.

'We are no longer talking of teachers teaching and learners learning, but of everyone contributing to the management of everyone's learning . . .'
(Allwright in Legutke and Thomas 1991: 17)

Challenges and Success

Materials writers have always had to face a big challenge when producing materials that would be sold worldwide: how to make them adequate for different contexts. On the other side of the line, teachers have always faced an even more challenging task: how to use materials produced in a foreign context and still keep their learners motivated.

The world has changed. Nowadays, what writers might worry about is finding ways of maximizing the advantages of a globally connected world while having a 'glocal perspective'. We are all citizens of the world where English is a must, but we are also aware of our role in this globalized world.

It seems that those changes have also influenced our teenage students who, according to Prensky (2001), are *digital natives*, much more autonomous and into games and activities using new technologies than ‘serious exercises’. They learn from using computers, the Internet, listening to music on their MP3 players, and watching TV series. Cable TV and DVDs also play a very important role in countries where English is not a first language, as it is an opportunity to ‘see’ language in context, that is, language that teenagers might actually use.

What materials writers and teachers need to have in mind is that materials are supposed to encourage learners to have a positive attitude towards learning English. Therefore, their aim must be to improve communication skills—both written and spoken—thus promoting interaction as well as fostering learner autonomy.

Challenges is a four-level course taking learners from A1 to B1 with reference to the levels of the Common European Framework. The topic-based approach of the book is clearly aimed at 11- to 14-year-old learners of English.

You can easily find your way through the student’s book as there is a segmented contents page. The layout is accessible to independent learners, and the rubrics are clear and concise. The language teaching goals are carefully integrated, and students will enjoy taking part in fun activities at the same time as they learn English. Additionally, at the end of the book, there is a picture dictionary and a magazine section, ‘Time out!’, which is very useful if you have fast learners in the classroom as it will keep them busy and thus aid general classroom discipline in a positive manner.

What widens the appeal of the series to teachers is the very useful resource book called ‘Total Teacher’s Pack’ with teacher development workshops, as well as photocopiable activities and a test master CD-ROM with placement tests, module tests, progress tests, and quick tests as well as listening tests and downloadable pdf activities. The *Challenges* teacher’s handbook is a quick reference guide with answers to exercises, teaching suggestions, and tape scripts to listening activities. The *Challenges* companion website for teachers and students with extra resources and a variety of interactive activities is an additional benefit to users of this series. There is also a testing and evaluation book accompanied by test audio tapes. Both the DVD *The Line* which can be used with *Challenges 1* and *2* and the DVD *The Real Shakespeare* which can be used for *Challenges 3* and *4* are accompanied by a video workbook and offer extra exposure to authentic input.

Although it could be said that there are no ‘zero beginners’ anymore among our *digital natives*, the only flaw I can see is that choosing *Challenges 1* to teach English to non-native students who are starting a course is too big a challenge, as it requires at least a year’s study before learners can start using it.

Success is a six-level course designed for students from the ages of 14- to 20-years-old. It aims at making it possible for real beginners to reach a level of competence that allows them to prepare for international exams, spanning as it does Common European Framework levels A1 to C1.

The objectives of each unit in *Success* are clearly stated. There is a variety of activities and the fact that the order of sections changes in every unit leading to unpredictability of lessons helps to keep learners motivated. Although its focus appears to be the state school sector, it should do well in language schools in Brazil as it might be suitable for that maturity-level and highly motivated students. The *Success* students' books offer topics that are appropriate for the age group and give learners practice in preparing for exams. The vocabulary sections offer enough opportunities for self-expression and stimulate thoughts and feelings, which will help to engage learners emotionally. The *Success* workbooks offer practice with exercise types found in international exams as well as containing self-assessment tests with keys. Both *Success* DVDs contain seven episodes. Each episode reviews the grammar from the two units of the student's book which it is designed to follow. There is also a video workbook with grammar, vocabulary, and speaking exercises. The British sense of humour is not likely to be interesting to Brazilian young learners, though.

Developing elementary learners' sense of achievement and responsibility for learning

In our educational system, learners are usually passive and often wait to be spoon-fed by teachers. However, it seems that the degree of autonomy may vary from one context to another though in most cases learners usually focus on grades and not necessarily on learning.

According to Oxford (1989), 'Motivation is related to language learning purpose', in other words, teachers are expected to give learners reasons for learning, enhancing self-esteem, and building their awareness to the language.

What role do materials play in autonomous language learning? What can teachers do to help learners enhance their learning? What could be done to improve learners' sense of progress? Learners might become interested and motivated once they start to take some control over their progress. The choice of materials will play an important role in fostering learners' autonomy. The elementary levels of the two series under review, *Challenges 1* and *Success Elementary*, offer students opportunities to reason deductively and analyse language, developing their cognitive strategies. They also help learners become culturally aware thus developing their social strategies.

What I like about *Challenges 1* is that it includes many good ideas like the 'Across cultures' sections which help learners personalize their learning and encourage teenagers to use the foreign language to express themselves. The projects suggested for the students' portfolios in *Challenges 1* are challenging and help to engage learners emotionally. In addition, each module in the book includes a 'Study corner' with language check exercises which help learners check their progress and contribute to raising awareness of their responsibility in the learning process thus becoming autonomous learners. The *Challenges 1* 'Study help' section with tips on learning strategies further contributes to the enhancement of the learning process.

In *Challenges 1*, the language used in the units is recycled in various ways and in different contexts throughout the book. The student's multi-ROM for interactive activities which accompanies the workbook offers audio activities as well as useful links to sites where students can get more information on topics presented in the student's book, and thus develop enthusiasm for the

foreign language and ensure progress. The *Challenges* companion website offers easy access to technology at a convenient time and allows even elementary learners to decide what and how much to do, and at the same time gives them the chance of success, building their confidence.

The topic-based approach of *Challenges 1*, indeed of the whole series, and the topics related to citizenship education might help learners pay more attention to their role in building a harmonious society.

Let us turn to *Success Elementary* now. It could be seen as a tool to foster autonomy as it might help teachers make learning training relevant to regular classroom language activities and help learners discover some learning strategies that suit them best. It must be added that materials might 'encourage the learner to reflect on what they are doing and why' (Edge and Wharton 1998), that is, materials might help learners to work towards autonomy.

What I like about *Success Elementary* is that there are plenty of audio materials. The CD-ROM that accompanies the student's book offers extra speaking activities on vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, and writing plus a verb list and a mini-grammar. The audio CD which accompanies the workbook also offers a series of listening and reading exercises plus self-assessment tests with answer keys and tape scripts providing practice with simple versions of exercise types found in international exams. Both these components would clearly contribute to learner training.

The *Success Elementary* teacher's support book offers ideas for warm-ups and a bank of extra photocopiable activities. It also provides a map of educational content and very useful culture notes entitled 'Culture shock'. The 'Culture shock' sections focus on cultural facts with background information about Britain and other English-speaking countries, building cultural awareness and providing the teacher with useful support.

There are frequent tips, which help students become active and autonomous in the *Success Elementary* student's book. The strategy boxes, entitled 'Train your brain', encourage learners to reflect on what they have learnt and promote learner autonomy. Learners can analyse language and come to conclusions about grammar rules with the 'Work it out' boxes or go through the 'Check it out' boxes, which will help them internalize grammar rules. In the 'Speak out' boxes, learners will see language in context. Finally, the 'Mind the trap!' sections offer tips on special difficulties and help learners avoid common mistakes.

An attractive feature of *Success Elementary* is the multimedia materials produced on CD-ROM. Learners may choose what to do among a range of options. Concerning pronunciation, there is a phonemic chart with sounds and exercises on the CD-ROM where the students can listen to sentences, repeat them, record themselves, and play them back to compare their pronunciation to the standard one found on the CD-ROM, thus allowing learners to see their progress.

What makes *Success Elementary* especially attractive for teachers is the test master CD-ROM with testing materials in an electronic version, in an

editable format where teachers can add or delete items as they wish. It also provides a useful evaluation and grading system. There is also a testing and evaluation book that includes mini-presentations, role plays, written assignments, projects for teachers who may not have access to computers, as well as a variety of tasks plus grading scales and interpretation of grades.

It could be said that both *Challenges 1* and *Success Elementary* are not only learner-friendly but also teacher-friendly. Learners are likely to infer rules for language use, making discoveries for themselves. Language is presented and practised in a way that facilitates systematic progress. The CD-ROMs in both series provide extra follow-up activities, allowing learners to decide what and how much to do and therefore making them responsible for their learning. As for the teachers, there seems to be no doubt that there has been a huge investment in ways to support them. One can find much more than the usual objectives and suggested activities in the teacher's handbook and support book. Both the test master CD-ROMs and the testing and evaluation book are particularly useful and will help save teachers precious time.

Mention should be made of the undeniable potential of the *Challenges 1* 'Total Teacher's Pack' where there are photocopiable resources as well as teacher development workshops helping teachers not only plan, monitor, and advise their learners but also reflect critically on their teaching.

In brief, *Challenges 1* and *Success Elementary* are both very useful materials offering a variety of language awareness activities and catering for different learning styles. They will help learners get ready for interaction with the real world. As a result, it is to be hoped that learners will become more motivated to learn and might have a warm feeling of progress using either of these series.

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