

To Artur [REDACTED]

Dear Mr [REDACTED],

My colleague, Jim Wright, tells me you would like a piece for the opening issue of your new mag. Here is a short article that I hope fits the bill.

Good luck with the new venture.

Please let me have a copy of the first issue.

Will the magazine have a web presence?

Yours sincerely,

Mario Rinvoluceri

*Written for
new Pearson mag
shortly to happen in
Poland*

biodata: Mario has just brought out **Humanising your Coursebook** with ETp Delta (Feb 2002). Through the 90's Mario was consultant to the Pilgrims-Longman list and he currently edits **Humanising Language Teaching**, that you will find on the web at < www.hltmag.co.uk > This is Pilgrim's web'zine for teachers. In 2000, Mario brought out his first CDrom, **Mindgame**, with Fetcher de Tellez, published by Clarity, whom you can find at < www.clarity.com.hk >

Renewing your Coursebook

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims. UK

The coursebook is like a kitchen, its cupboards packed with groceries, vegetables and fruit. The assembling of these raw materials has normally been done with great skill and care by a large team of authors and editors.

The experienced teacher will walk into the coursebook kitchen and begin working the food into dishes, using the recipes she has learnt over years of teaching. When she is not sure of how to use a particular ingredient, she will go to this kitchen's recipe book, (the Teacher's Book), and see how they suggest this ingredient should be used.

The inexperienced teacher/cook, will go straight to the Teacher's Book, lest she be overwhelmed by the vast array of foods. Typically she will start her career holding tight onto the Teacher's Book until she has internalised enough cooking knowledge to work out her own recipes and menus, independently of the TB and with her particular eaters/students' needs in mind.

I offer you above paragraphs as a description of much EFL teaching over the past 40 years, ever since the appearance of the first modern coursebooks, titles such as Alexander's **First Things First**, Longman, and Broughton's **Success with English**, Penguin. The above scenario has many good features:

- apparent (1) order brought into the complex chaos of language teaching
- security for both teachers and student
- language that apparently(2) conforms to native speaking patterns
- efficient time saving for the teacher

- some autonomy for the student

The main negative feature of a coursebook guided teaching –learning world can be summed up two key words:

Routine

and

boredom

When the experienced teacher is taking a new group of students through a coursebook she has used three or four times before, she knows many of the readings and listening off by heart, she is watching out for the reactions she has come to expect to each page of the book, she know exactly how long each exercise will last and how far through the unit they will have got by the time the bell shrills, rings or wails. Her routinised dream does nothing to bring excitement or thrill to the 40 young people in front of her. Students read the mood of their teacher with breathtaking accuracy and they know she is bored out of her head.

When the inexperienced teacher teaches the coursebook to to the tunes and melodies found in the Teacher's Book, she may end up playing rather samey music. Again the risk of lulling the students to sleep is high.

One way to avoid the tedium endemic in the culture of the coursebook

A major way that many teachers have tried in the past is to use the Teacher Resource Book genre. The main UK lists of such books currently available are:

The Pilgrims-Longman list (general Editor Linstromberg) (this is a discontinued one but you will find these books in flats, houses, schools and libraries all over Europe)

The Alan Maley Teachers' Resource Book list with OUP

The Adrian Underhill list with Heinemann (now Pearson)

The Cambridge Teacher Handbook series.

These books have spiced up many a coursebook-focused lesson around the world over the past 25 years. The great virtue of the TRBook is that the teacher can draw on the thinking and imagination of a mind or minds different from the ones that wrote the coursebook. The type of lesson choreography she will find in a good TRB will breathe new oxygen into the coursebook material. To revert ot the kitchen metaphor, the cook using a Thai cookbook (Teacher's Resource Book) will do quite different things with her green vegetables to those suggested in in her normal cookbook (The Teacher's Book). These new tastes she conjures from the same old veg may well delight the palates of her eaters (students).

The trouble with using TRB's is that it is hard to "marry" them to your current coursebook. You may have to do quite a bit of quick reading until you find what you actually want for dealing with this or that unit in your coursebook. It is almost as if TRB's were designed for people who do not use coursebooks, and these are probably quite a small minority when one looks across the whole of the EFL profession.

The start of a New Genre of Teacher Help Book

What is needed is a book which brings new oxygen into the coursebook culture in a targeted and efficient way. We need a Thai cookbook which deals specifically and in detail with the preparation of the rice, the veg, the meat etc we actually have in our specific kitchen, (our coursebook).

What is needed is a book that can enliven our coursebook teaching from **outside the mindset of the coursebook writers**, but that fits in with the order and sequence set out in the coursebook. This book must be as handy and easy to use as the Teacher's Book, and it must **not** involve us in lengthy preparation. What we need are new, surprising and enlightening bolt-on exercises that help us and our students to see the materials (ones we may have taught through many times) with new eyes.

To say that my recently published book, **Humanising your Coursebook**, ETp-Delta, London, Feb 2002 properly answers this need, would be inaccurate and arrogant. What I hope is that **Humanising your Coursebook** will turn out to be the first of a new genre of resource book that acts as a sort of alternative Teacher's Book. If the Teacher's Book is the spouse of the coursebook materials, then **HYC** and other books like it, will be a kind of lover, with all the thrill that the new relationship offers.

Enough of the poetry. How can you use **HYC**?

I imagine you sitting preparing a lesson with three texts in front of you on your desk:

the student materials unit

the Teacher suggestions page

Humanise Your Course book.

You decide to deal first with the reading passage in the unit. You read the student materials, you read the TB suggestions and then you riffle through Section 4 of **HYC** which focuses on exploiting reading passages.

You choose the activity idea you feel best fits this text.

You then decide to present the grammar in the unit - having checked the TB suggestions, you turn to Section 2 in **HYC** which deals with Grammar, and see if any of the subversive ideas you find there might make sense in the context of this particular group of students.

As you can see from the above description of a spot of lesson preparation, this new type of help book is designed to intertwine with your CB student materials and with the TB lesson suggestions.

The downside of Humanising your Coursebook

COURSE BOOK
HUMANISING YOUR
COURSE BOOK

The book's main defect is that it has been written as a companion to all and any coursebooks. In my view it is not specific enough to your particular Coursebook. I foresee that in future publishers may well decide to add an **independent** help book to the overall coursebook package, a help book written by people who have **NOT** taken part in developing the student materials, who have not communicated with the CB writers and whose view of teaching is possibly stimulatingly different from that of the CB authors. The aim of the Help Book is to bring options, divergent thinking, newness to combat that plague of the coursebook: **boredom**.

A taste of HYC

I have written a whole piece for practising teachers without mentioning a single exercise: high time to remedy this omission.

What kind of activities will you find in **HYC**, what feel does the book have?

Let's listen in on low level students practising numbers. They are working in pairs. Here's what one pair are up to:

Student A zero

Student B one hundred

Student A two

Student B ninety eight

Student A four

Student B ninety six

Student A six

Student B: ninety four

they stop when they meet at fifty.

Counting in both directions is a stimulating, making-new activity that most students will not have tried in mother tongue. They are getting to do something **NEW** in the target language.

And here's a second activity:

Ask the students to read through the CB passage and tell half the class, working individually, to underline three words or phrases they *like* in the passage, while the other half of the class underline three words or collocations they *dislike*, for whatever reason.

Ask a student to read out her first phrase/word and tell the group why she likes or dislikes it. Listen to the student's explanation with all ears, and non-judgementally. Ask her to read out her second underlined word etc.....

Do this with around 6-10 students.

This brilliant activity has the group burrowing through their emotional and linguistic reactions to the text. It is a kind of "analyse de texte", but so much fuller and less dry.

The aim of **HYC** is to stimulate, arouse and surprise, but always within the context of the CB student materials.

Should you want to react to this article, please write to me at mario@pilgrims.co.uk
Please also go and have a look at our webzine for language teachers which you will find at www.hltmag.co.uk

- (1) the real **order**, the amazingly powerful **order** in language learning is a totally unconscious process within the learner that possibly derives from the hard wiring of the brain and has little to do with the surface, conscious order imposed by editors and writers of course materials
- (2) Corpus Linguistics, especially the work of Carter and McCarthy (Cancode) has shown that much coursebook language follows the grammar and discourse patterns of *written* English while purporting to teach the students the *oral* side of the language. Coursebook dialogues rarely remind you of what you hear in real dialogues between natives.